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ABSTRACT

Intended for English-language arts teachers, principals, curriculum and testing specialists, and superintendents, this handbook assists educators in preparing students for California's writing assessment. The handbook begins with a program overview and a discussion of writing assessment and the curriculum. The handbook then provides high school writing guides for each of the eight types of writing identified as most appropriate for high school: autobiographical incident; controversial issues; evaluation; interpretation; observational writing; reflective essay; report of information; and speculation about causes and effects. The writing guides for each type of writing present: a description of the type of writing; sample student essays of varying quality; a discussion of students' writing processes for that type of writing; classroom writing assignments for a variety of content areas; guidelines for writing prompts; and published examples of the type of writing. The handbook also provides rhetorical effectiveness scoring guides for each of the eight types of writing. The handbook concludes with a discussion of students with special needs. (RS)

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Writing Assessment Handbook

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CLAS California Learning Assessment System

High School

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California Department of Education, 1993

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Writing Assessment Handbook

CLAS California Learning Assessment System

High School

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Contents

Preface v

Acknowledgments vii

Program Overview 1

Writing Assessment and the Curriculum 7

High School Writing Guides

Autobiographical Incident 11
Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide 29

Controversial Issue 33
Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide 61

Evaluation 65
Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide 83

Interpretation 87
Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide 106

Observational Writing 109
Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide 133

Reflective Essay 137
Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide 160

Report of Information 163
Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide 183

Speculation About Causes and Effects 187
Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide 210

Students With Special Needs 215

Preface

The successful launching of California's writing assessment in 1986–87 signaled a major movement toward the California Department of Education's goal to align assessment with curriculum as defined in the *English–Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve*. The first segment of a comprehensive process for establishing a "purposeful" and "constructive" method for assessing "the application of skills and strategies to a variety of listening, speaking, reading, and writing contexts . . . evaluating each aspect of language arts comprehensively . . ." began as a part of the educational reform mandated through the Hughes-Hart Educational Reform Act of 1983 (Senate Bill 813).

Prior to the development of the state writing assessment, the California Assessment Program (mandated in 1972) was limited to multiple-choice tests of written expression. Students were tested for their knowledge about writing, but the assessment failed to test the real thing: actual student writing. Without a statewide writing achievement test, we simply could not answer the question: How well do students in California write? We also were unable to measure students' use of higher level thinking skills in a wide variety of writing situations. If effective school programs for writing instruction were to empower students to become thinking writers able to accomplish a range of complex tasks and if assessment methods were to mirror effective instruction, it became apparent that a different and more performance-based approach to assessment was needed.

Representing the best thinking of outstanding educators and testing experts, the writing assessment provides a strong foundation for the development of an integrated English–language arts assessment. The hard work of dedicated professionals continues as they bring together the writing test with a new performance-based reading component that also incorporates listening and speaking into the evaluation process.

In the spirit of the state framework, the model curriculum guides, and the model curriculum standards, we present this *Writing Assessment Handbook: High School*. The handbook is intended for English–language arts teachers, principals, curriculum and testing specialists, superintendents, and all educators interested in preparing students for the high school writing assessment. A committee of teachers and writing specialists carefully prepared this material to ensure that any preparation for the writing assessment will also result in improving writing instruction for students.

We hope all members of the educational community will work together to help students become effective in their use of language. As Ernest L. Boyer emphasized in *High School*, "Clear writing leads to clear thinking; clear thinking is the basis of clear writing. Perhaps more than any other form of communication, writing holds us responsible for our words and ultimately makes us more thoughtful human beings."

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Acknowledgments

To acknowledge all of the people who have contributed directly and indirectly to California's writing assessment, it is necessary to tell the entire story about the evolution of writing assessment in California. Writing assessment began in 1972 with the transformation of the state testing program into the California Assessment Program.

The first step was the formation of the English Language Assessment Advisory Committee. This group formulated basic principles and guidelines for the multiple-choice assessment of written expression. Those guidelines were germane to the development of the writing assessment. That committee also spearheaded a writing assessment of California high school seniors in 1975. The results provided a useful backdrop of experience and information for the developmental work of the 1980s.

The first tests of written expression were introduced at grades six and twelve in 1974-75. Always striving for improvements in the testing program, members of the committee worked very hard on the development of new and revised tests. The tests evolved over the years as did the committee, which was aware of the severe limitations of multiple-choice tests and the desire for an improved testing approach.

In spite of the improvements in the multiple-choice tests, a need still existed for an assessment of real student writing. In 1984 a pilot project was initiated at grade eight to explore alternative approaches to writing assessment methodology and to identify experienced teacher-evaluators of student writing throughout California. At this time a statewide Writing Assessment Advisory Committee was constituted to guide our effort.

Following the 1984 pilot project, the Writing Assessment Advisory Committee continued to function in a central advisory capacity, bringing continuity to the test development process. Special ad hoc groups were created to deal with specific tasks and issues arising along the way. The first of these tasks was to map a comprehensive array of the types of writing that exist in the real world and in a strong English–language arts curriculum for students in kindergarten through grade twelve. A special ad hoc committee was formed to address that important task in the context of designing a writing assessment, and another ad hoc committee was convened to resolve a variety of difficult scoring issues.

Special groups of teachers also were convened from time to time to assist in the development of literature-based prompts to ensure alignment between the writing assessment and the *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve* for English–language arts.

Moving toward large-scale test development, in 1985 a Request for Proposal was distributed to companies interested in bidding for the development of the writing assessment. The contract was awarded to Educational Testing Service (ETS), which brought together experts from the California Writing Project, the California Literature Project, universities, county offices of education, and educational consulting firms.

Working closely with the Department of Education, ETS's first step was the formation of the Writing Development Team, which consisted of teachers representing the California Writing Project, the California Literature Project, and a cross section of geographical regions and constituencies throughout the state. This team provided key leadership in both test development and staff development activities for California.

Members of the team also created the writing guides contained in this document as indicated on each guide.

Eighty outstanding teachers of English–language arts were identified through the California Writing Project to participate in a special field study of the writing prompts conducted in 1986.

Many educators participated as readers and writing evaluators in central and regional scoring sessions during the summer of 1986.

We extend a special thanks to the California Association for Bilingual Education and the Department's Bilingual Education Unit for reviewing and providing useful suggestions for the section "Students with Special Needs."

The production of this document and the entire staff development effort supporting this project would not have been possible without a spirit of cooperation among the many groups in the edu-

cational community. Our mentors and colleagues within the Department of Education have provided a model for this kind of cooperative activity.

We sincerely appreciate all of the dedicated professionals with whom we have had the privilege of working over the long development of this exciting project. We are grateful for their willingness to devote time that was being saved for other professional efforts; for their patience and tolerance for the opinions of others in an arena where all professionals hold tenaciously to carefully formed views; and most of all, for making our lives richer, more exciting and, yes, it sounds trite, but more fulfilling. They have put our assumptions to the test, given us new perspectives, and have taught us much about writing, about the assessment of writing, and about ourselves. Together we can draw on the full potential of assessment to help teachers help students improve their ability to think, to express thoughts more effectively, and to develop a broad repertoire of capabilities for communicating those thoughts and feelings, that is—to be able to "play freely the whole symbolic scale."

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Program Overview

As stated in the *English–Language Arts Framework*, the goals of English–language arts instruction involve preparing all students to (1) function as informed and effective citizens in our democratic society; (2) function effectively in the world of work; and (3) realize personal fulfillment. In supporting these goals, English teachers recognize that humans use language actively, interactively, constructively, strategically, and fluently as they create and communicate meaning. Students grow in their ability to use language as they explore the universe of discourse through their reading, writing, and thinking.

The writers of the *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve* for English–language arts envisioned a meaning-based English–language arts program that engaged students actively in writing and reflecting on literature and human experience.The assessment for this type of program would need to be an appropriate match in order to be effective. Standard Number 25 of the *Model Curriculum Standards* states: "Assessment methods and tools should be aligned with the new emphasis (1) on substance; (2) on the integration of writing, comprehension, and speaking; and (3) on contextual acquisition of vocabulary and technical skills."[1]

Clearly, a new approach to assessment was needed—one that went beyond multiple-choice questions, one that integrated the language arts, one that involved a range of whole types of writing existing in the real world and in the best English programs, one in which literature could stand at the core along with the experience that students bring to it, one that approached writing as a process, one that reflected a range of higher-order thinking, one that could be extended across the curriculum, and one that was for all students.

California launched such an assessment in the spring of 1987 for the eighth grade. The twelfth-grade assessment followed in December of 1988.

This effort was spearheaded by the Department of Education in conjunction with assessment advisory committees that consisted of elementary and secondary teachers; curriculum specialists; testing experts and administrators from district and county offices; university professors; and representatives from the California Writing Project, the California Literature Project, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. In addition to the advisory committees, a writing development team composed almost entirely of eighth-grade and twelfth-grade teachers and California Writing Project and California Literature Project representatives, was constituted to provide leadership in the central test development and staff development activities.

Program Description

California's method of assessing writing, designed to be state-of-the-art, reflects the philosophy of the *Model Curriculum Standards, English–Language Arts Framework*, and research about effective writing instruction. The assessment has been designed to:

- Monitor achievement in writing in California schools and detect any decline or improvement in achievement in high school.
- Assess the implementation of the *English–Language Arts Framework*.
- Encourage more writing and more different types of writing in California classrooms.
- Provide information and materials that will help teachers strengthen their writing programs.

The assessment encompasses a variety of types of writing to monitor how well students can respond to a variety of situations and to recognize schools that encourage frequent writing in an array of writing/thinking tasks.

California's assessment of writing can best be understood by a consideration of the three primary parts of the program:

- The domains or types of writing to be tested
- The writing tasks or prompts
- The scoring system

[1] *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve* (First Edition). Sacramento: California Department of Education, 1985, p. E-32.

Each part of the program, as well as the rationale and development process for each part, is described in the following paragraphs.

Types of Writing

Eight types of writing were identified as most appropriate for high school: autobiographical incident, evaluation, interpretation, reflective essay, report of information, speculation about causes and effects, controversial issue, and observation. These types of writing allow students to write from personal experience, from information acquired in all subjects in the curriculum, and from literature.

Rationale

Assessment of student achievement or of the effectiveness of instructional programs must concern itself with the central domains of a school subject. In the case of writing, those domains are the various types of writing assigned in exemplary school writing programs. The purpose of assessing writing must be to determine students' thinking, problem-solving, and text-making strategies in varied writing situations.

To assess writing achievement, then, we assess students' skills in writing dialogues, fables, autobiographies, reports, summaries, interpretations, proposals, evaluations, and so on. We want to know what students can do when they reflect on personal experience, describe how something works, speculate about the causes of a trend, interpret an unfamiliar story or poem, or defend an evaluation of a movie. The criteria and standards of assessment can then be derived from a careful study of each type of writing. Because each type requires special composing and text-making strategies, the criteria and standards differ for each type. The eight types of writing for high school cover a variety of writing experiences, including personal writing (autobiographical incident and reflective essay), expository or explanatory writing (report of information and observation), and argument or persuasive writing (controversial issue, speculation about causes and effects, and evaluation).

The approach is consistent with Standard Number 10 in the *Model Curriculum Standards*: "Districts and/or schools develop a systematic writing program."[2] Under this standard, educators are encouraged to increase the frequency of writing assignments, increase the number of types of assignments, assign types of writing that exist in the real world, and teach writing across the curriculum.

It is also consistent with Standard Number 11: "All students will learn that writing is a process that includes stages called prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing."[3] Those writing stages include higher-level thinking, analysis and synthesis, and inferential and evaluative skills. Under this standard teachers are reminded that:

- Students develop fluency in writing as they write frequently on a variety of topics.
- Students develop a sense of audience for their writing as they compose papers for a variety of groups or individuals.
- Students identify a specific purpose for each piece of writing.

Presenting several writing tasks in different types of writing ensures that writing assessment reflects the *Model Curriculum Standards* and that it does not narrow or constrict school writing programs. Quite the contrary, presenting several tasks encourages careful teaching of several types of writing in the spirit of the *Model Curriculum Standards*.

Development

The first step in developing an assessment of writing was to specify a comprehensive list of types of writing that would define the possible content domains to be assessed. The developers sought a comprehensible framework including types of writing that would be desirable in a complete writing curriculum. This framework covered a broad range of types including personal, expository (explanatory), and persuasive writing. It was from this comprehensive list of types of writing that the eight types to be assessed in high school were derived. To identify the eight types of writing, the following criteria were used:

- *Curricular emphasis of the best school writing programs.* We asked whether California's best writing teachers at a grade level were likely to assign a type of writing. We wanted to be certain that the best teachers would both value a type of writing and

[2] *Model Curriculum Standards*, p. E-14.

[3] *Model Curriculum Standards*, p. E-17.

consider it central to the curriculum as suggested by the *Model Curriculum Standards*.
- *Students' reading experiences*. We asked whether students were developmentally ready to engage in a type of writing.
- *Curricular sequence between grades three and twelve*. We considered whether a grade-level set of writing types appropriately followed an earlier set and at the same time prepared students for a later set. We also considered what kinds of writing and thinking are needed for success in other disciplines, such as history–social science and science.
- *Appropriateness for testing*. We asked whether it was fair to expect students to compose a given type of writing in a 45-minute period. Such types as song lyrics and poetry, while desirable in a complete writing curriculum, were judged as inappropriate for assessment purposes.

Writing Tasks

Several writing tasks or prompts have been developed for each type of writing to be tested. Each writing task for the high school test is divided into two parts: a writing situation and directions for writing. An illustrative prompt designed to assess evaluation follows:

Writing Situation: Think about all the literature—stories, novels, poems, plays, essays—you have read this year in your English class. Choose the one you have enjoyed the most.

Directions for Writing: Write an essay for your English teacher in which you evaluate your favorite literary work. Give reasons for your judgment. Tell your teacher why this work is valuable or not valuable. Your teacher will use your evaluation in selecting literature for next year's class.

Rationale

The writing situation orients students to the type of writing they will be doing, and it gives them a specific topic or a choice of topics. It defines (directly and through examples) any special terms or concepts. It focuses students' thinking and planning and helps them anticipate problems they must solve and information they must generate as they write.

The directions for writing suggest requirements and features of the essay without being prescriptive or formulaic. The directions provide a purpose for the essay, and they always mention readers, sometimes identifying a particular reader and at other times merely referring to readers' expectations or needs. This process ensures that the prompts are based on a communication model for which a specific audience has been identified.

Every writing task gives all students an equal chance to demonstrate their skills as writers. The array of tasks gives schools and districts equal opportunities to demonstrate high levels of student writing achievement. Each task is worded clearly and invitingly in a conversational style, providing some context without unnecessary wordiness.

Development

The prompt development for this assessment has been a comprehensive, rigorous, and painstaking process. Initially, large numbers of prompts were collected from numerous sources, including district item collections, Educational Testing Service advanced placement tests, other state assessment programs, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and California teachers' files. These prompts were first classified by the type of writing to be assessed in grades eight and high school. The advisory committees and several other groups met throughout the course of a year to develop additional prompts appropriate to the grade levels to be tested. In 1986, the writing development team was formed to assume responsibilities for test development. This group and some advisory committee members reviewed all of the prompts in the prompt pool, wrote new prompts, and narrowed the prompt pool to the number of prompts to be field tested.

Eighty outstanding teachers were identified through the California Writing Project to participate in a special field study. Each of these teachers administered two essay topics to 100 students (50 per topic), helped students complete a questionnaire, examined the students' essays and questionnaires, conducted interviews with students about the prompts and their difficulties with them, summarized the information on each of the two essay topics on teachers' questionnaires, and returned the materials for scrutiny by the writing development team. The prompts were then revised and the prompt pool was narrowed to a 56-item pool, using carefully specified prompt revi-

sion guidelines. In addition, the prompts were checked against the following six criteria. According to the criteria each prompt should:

- Invite the type of student writing desired.
- Engage the thinking, problem-solving, composing, and text-making processes central to the type of writing.
- Be an assignment that teachers would want to give to students.
- Be challenging for many students.
- Be easy for many students and produce interesting, not just proficient, writing.
- Be liked by some students.

Seven prompts for each of the eight types of writing were then field-tested. Every district that wished to participate in field testing was included, resulting in a statewide sample of about 20,000 students. More than 100 additional prompts were field-tested in the spring of 1988. Papers from the field tests were used for the development and refinement of scoring guides for central and regional scoring sessions.

Scoring System

To monitor achievement in writing, selected readers for the writing assessment analyze and score students' essays (1) for rhetorical effectiveness and (2) for conventions.

Rhetorical Effectiveness

All writing from the various tasks devised to assess one type of writing is scored with a special criterion-referenced scoring guide. A rhetorical effectiveness score (on a scale of one to six) is assigned to each essay. That score focuses on thinking and writing requirements for each type of writing. The six rhetorical score points identify a wide range of achievement in a type of writing—from inadequate through acceptable to exceptional. Results enable a school to know how well its students have learned to compose several types of writing.

Conventions

Essays also are examined (on a scale of one to six) to determine students' success with the conventions of standard edited English. The conventions score reflects students' mastery of English usage, mechanics, and spelling.

Rationale

The scoring system developed has numerous advantages. The rhetorical score provides teachers and administrators with information about students' achievement in the special thinking and composing requirements of a type of writing. The scoring guide provides clear directions to teachers to use in helping students improve their writing achievement without being limiting or restrictive. Teachers can compare students' achievement among different types of writing to identify instructional strengths and weaknesses, leading to improved curricula that focus on different kinds of higher-order thinking, writing, and communication abilities. The conventions score—reported holistically as a general impression score—reflects students' mastery of standard edited English. With this information, teachers can compare students' achievement on higher-order composing skills with students' achievement in the more mechanical supporting skills of usage, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

The scoring system corresponds to the concept of teaching writing as a process that is described in the *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program* and in the *Model Curriculum Standards* for the English–language arts. The rhetorical effectiveness score reflects higher-order thinking, composing, and communication abilities, which are central to the prewriting, drafting, and revising stages of the writing process. The conventions score is separate and last and underscores the concept that supporting skills are best treated in the context of real writing during the editing stage of the writing process, after the student has wrestled with the ideas and information he or she wishes to communicate to a given audience.

Development

The scoring system evolved out of a 1984 grade eight pilot project. Several scoring systems were explored during this preliminary study to examine various writing assessment methodologies and to determine the most appropriate scoring approach.

A special ad hoc committee was formed to resolve a number of complicated scoring issues that had arisen during the grade eight pilot project. After considering the instructional implications of each scoring system and the relationship of those to the *Model Curriculum Standards*, the

ad hoc committee agreed on the scoring system now used.

Members of the writing development team developed the scoring guides for the types of writing to be assessed for high school. The criteria and standards embedded in each scoring guide were derived from a careful study of each type of writing. Writing team members then wrote on a given prompt from the array of prompts representing selected writing types. The teacher-created essays were used as the basis for a discussion about the special characteristics of each type of writing. Using an abundance of student essays produced during the 1986 and 1988 field tests, members of the team continued an in-depth study of the student papers to determine the special requirements and range of possibilities for each type of writing. Once the scoring guides were drafted, they underwent an extensive review by the members of the writing assessment advisory committee and the development team. The scoring guides were tested during the central and regional scoring sessions. Reader responses from the scoring sessions provided useful feedback for continuing revision and refinement of the guides.

Special Features

California's assessment of writing has numerous features that make it unique in the nation. These features arise from the alignment of the assessment with the *Model Curriculum Standards* for English–language arts, a highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art curriculum. The most important of these special features are highlighted here.

Literature and Student Experience

Just as the *Model Curriculum Standards* encourage teaching a variety of literary genres and kinds of writing, so does the assessment cover a variety of writing types. Each writing guide contains illustrative students' essays, an example of a published piece exemplifying a given writing type, and lists of high-quality literary selections that can be used to help center the teaching of reading, writing, and oral language around literature.

Each prompt can be classified as one of three kinds: (1) experience-based, which requires the students to rely only on personal experience; (2) literature-based, in which students are asked to draw on their memories of a favorite book, story, fictional character, hero, and so forth in their responses to the prompt or in which a literary text is provided in conjunction with a prompt; and (3) curriculum-based, which requires students to draw on their reading and studies in other subjects and from their observations of events and activities. If all of the prompts were literature-based, certain kinds of extremely valuable student writing, such as autobiographical incident, would be completely excluded from the assessment, resulting in a much narrower array of writing types. Certainly, if students are to acquire the ability to lead "an examined life," they must be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences as well as on literature. The final pool of writing prompts in the assessment include all three kinds with the greatest emphasis on experience-based prompts. The slow and careful phase-in of types of writing was designed to give curriculum planners and teachers time to orchestrate the implications of a fully integrated language arts assessment at the local level.

Higher-level Thinking Processes

A complete range of higher-level thinking processes such as convergent and divergent thinking, analysis, synthesis, and inferential and evaluative skills—as called for in the *Model Curriculum Standards*—is being tapped through the California assessment. Students cannot get by with merely filling in blanks. They must show in writing their ability to think; that is, to draw on knowledge, including memory of personal experience, to do such things as narrate an incident, report information, argue for a solution to a problem, or justify a judgment. Each type of writing embodies a complete set of thinking, composing, decision-making, and problem-solving requirements that cannot be addressed without engaging those centers of the brain that preside over higher-level thinking.

Writing Across the Curriculum

The types of writing/thinking to be assessed in the high school assessment can easily be extended across the curriculum. For example, report of information, speculation about causes and effects, and evaluation are kinds of writing occurring naturally in the study of science and history–social science. The writing guides include examples of prompts that can be used in a variety of curricular areas. This is in keeping with Model Curriculum Standard Number 8, in

which students are urged to learn more about the perspectives of other disciplines, such as science, history, economics, mathematics, and art. Under this standard departments are encouraged to plan their syllabi together, allowing each area of thought to impact on the other areas, enriching and balancing them. History, science, mathematics, economics, physical education, and art teachers may wish to become more familiar with the types of writing being assessed to expand their thinking about desirable writing/ thinking tasks possible within their disciplines. All teachers at a high school site will be interested in the results of their writing assessment since these writing/thinking skills must be the shared concern of all educators.

An Achievement Test

A test worthy of reflecting the far-reaching goals of the *Model Curriculum Standards* must be an achievement test, not a minimal competency test. The assessment is not designed to measure the minimal skills that students might need to function at a marginal level in society. On the contrary, the assessment of writing is a wide-range achievement test. It enables students of many ability levels to demonstrate their writing achievements, while challenging the best students to do their best. It sets high standards of achievement for each type of writing assessed. Since the scoring system describes in detail the standards of achievement for each type of writing, teachers and students will know what they must do to achieve success. Hence, the scoring system is sensitive to good teaching and improved achievement as the characteristics of "good" writing are demystified. The results will be a useful tool for strengthening schoolwide writing programs to benefit all students.

Writing Assessment and the Curriculum

Writing demands attention to ideas. Fledgling writers and seasoned professionals alike recognize this fact. They also share the need to express their ideas to others, to shape their ideas to address various audiences for a variety of purposes—whether to report information, evaluate results of an experiment or the worth of a literary work, or reflect on the significance of a personal experience. Because writing requires students to focus on ideas and their formulation, writing is an integral part of California's curriculum reform.

As both a communication skill and a means for thinking about subject matter, writing is a part of every curriculum area; therefore, the state assessment of writing affects all areas of the instructional program. Because of the importance of writing in the education of all students, a clear understanding of the specific connections between curriculum and the assessment described in this section will help curriculum personnel, principals, and teachers strengthen the total instructional program.

Relationship of Writing Assessment to Frameworks and Model Curriculum Standards

Especially important to improving student performance at all grade levels and in all subject areas is the match of assessment with what is being taught. California Department of Education documents such as the *English–Language Arts Framework* and the *Model Curriculum Standards, Grades Nine Through Twelve* set the overall direction for implementation of California curriculum reform; that is, they provide general principles for what is being taught.

Standard Number 25 of the *Model Curriculum Standards, Grades Nine Through Twelve* directly addresses the issue of assessment: "Assessment methods and tools should be aligned with the new emphasis (1) on substance; (2) on the integration of writing, comprehension, and speaking; and (3) on contextual acquisition of vocabulary and technical skills."[1] Similar statements regarding assessment are found in the *English–Language Arts Model Curriculum Guide, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* and the *Framework*.

The state writing assessment, in acknowledgment of the new direction, moves measurement of student achievement beyond the multiple-choice test. It measures the extent to which students are able to draw meanings from given examples of text, from text they have already read in their classroom studies or from personal experience, and to use these meanings for a broad variety of purposes.

At high school the following purposes are provided:

- Narrate an incident from personal experience and reflect on its significance (autobiographical incident).
- Express a point of view on a controversy (controversial issue).
- Apply self-developed criteria to assess the worth of an idea, an experience, or a work of art (evaluation).
- Describe an event from firsthand observation and give details to help readers experience what was observed (observational writing).
- Conjecture about the consequences of a given circumstance or action (speculation about causes or effects).
- Draw conclusions about the meaning of a given phenomenon, supported by reasons for the conclusions (interpretation).
- Select and formulate data so that someone else can understand them (report of information).
- Describe an event from firsthand observation to generalize about human experience (reflective essay).

[1] *Model Curriculum Standards: Grades Nine Through Twelve* (First edition). Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1985, p. E-32.

Each kind or genre of writing results from a particular thinking and composing task the writer has set or has had set for him or her. In English–language arts, where literature is the core of the curriculum, students are encouraged to read and write across the range of the kinds of writing previously cited as well as many other kinds. In other subject areas specific kinds of writing prevail over others.

The scoring procedures for the assessment of writing also reflect attention to the framework for English–language arts. The rhetorical effectiveness score is a measure of the abilities of students to express and support, in writing, their opinions, interpretations, solutions, explanations, and evaluations; that is, the emphasis of the score is on substance and meaning.

The assessment of language conventions, the second score, is also in keeping with the curriculum reform. The facets of edited written English are, as the framework makes clear, developed through use in realistic communicative situations. Because grammar, usage, and spelling are learned best in the context of their use, the writing assessment measures them that way. The test measures the control students have gained over such conventions or technical skills as punctuation and spelling within their own writing. To provide information for instruction, therefore, the state assessment supports the framework's emphasis on students' ability to make sense (the rhetorical effectiveness score) and to edit their work (the conventions score).

Teaching Writing as a Process

One of the negative effects of multiple-choice testing has been the rush to direct instruction of the surface features of the written product; that is, the conventions of edited written language. The result has been that students often can recite the rules of language use but are unable to put them into practice in their own writing. A test that recognizes the connections between thinking and writing as well as the developmental nature of acquiring skill with the conventions of written English is needed.

The emphasis on writing as a process is a reaction to the historical emphasis on assignment and assessment of student-written products without teacher intervention. With evidence from both research and practice that all students benefit from instruction and reader response before and during the writing task, teachers have been urged to redirect their energies and time toward helping students learn to use the adaptable and recursive steps that good writers typically take; that is, the steps of the writing process. Briefly, the steps are:

- Generating ideas, discovering and clarifying prior knowledge, and making connections with new information (the prewriting stage, which may occur throughout the process)
- Trying out those ideas in an appropriate form or kind of writing: for example, a story, report, or poem (the drafting stage, which may consist of any number of try-outs)
- Making changes in each draft as a result of reviewing what has been written and rethinking the effect of it on the intended reader (the revising stage)
- Correcting errors in usage, adding transitions, and selecting just the right words for the intended purpose (the editing stage)

Learning to manage the writing process will help students face time limits and the blank page with confidence because they will know how to proceed. The teacher's role is to foster the process, setting the classroom climate for the sharing of ideas and their formulation as a regular part of instruction. The writing guides, prepared for each kind of writing assessed, explain and illustrate ways to use the writing process in each of the communicative situations out of which emerge the variety of genres—reports, reflections, biographies, and evaluations, to name a few.

Relationship of Writing Assessment to Subject Areas Other Than English–Language Arts

At the heart of the curriculum reform in all disciplines is the need for a rigorous academic program for the majority of students at all grade levels. Academic rigor requires a comprehensive, coherent, and articulated focus on context-based writing instruction. Therefore, teachers of all subject areas will be interested in the state assessment of writing.

Although the teaching of English–language arts traditionally focuses on helping students learn to write well, instructional emphases in other subject areas also benefit from the way writing helps students to think and compose in the forms germane to learning those subjects. For example, teachers of science typically expect

students to write reports of information as a way of clarifying concepts as well as a way of measuring understanding. History–social science teachers feature the biographical sketch as a way of helping students develop historical perspective. Observational writing is important in many subjects. The kinds of writing to be assessed in the high school writing assessment are important types of writing and thinking for teachers in all content areas to understand and teach where applicable.

Benefits of Assessing Writing Development

School staffs receive yearly reports of the achievement of their students at key grade levels in specific kinds of writing through the state writing assessment. With this documentation, teachers are able to trace the extent to which students at their schools are learning set performance standards. Those local academic standards reflect reasonable expectations for a cross section of California's diverse student population and, while high, are standards achievable by most. Because the standards are explained fully in the writing guides and demonstrated in special workshops conducted throughout the state, teachers will be able to use them for measuring student progress in their own classrooms, schools, and districts.

Topics for the Assessment

Statewide testing requires that assigned tasks reflect the interests and instructional levels of a wide range of students. Although the writing tasks are posed under test conditions, which no writer would consider ideal for writing well, they are based on the kinds of real writing available in trade books, magazines, and newspapers, as well as in anthologies.

As for assigned versus self-selected topics, the National Assessment for Educational Progress suggests that although students control topic and purpose for writing in a variety and range of tasks, sometimes "careful directions can help them accomplish more complex purposes." The types of writing in the state assessment illustrate only a few of the many tasks that should be assigned and carefully taught in a good school writing program. (Cumulative collections or portfolios of student writing during the year should also include student-selected topics and purposes so that students have ample opportunity to gain fluency.)

Relationship of the State Writing Assessment to District and School Instruction and Assessment

The state assessment measures student writing achievement for school districts and their schools each year. Teachers, therefore, may want to choose several of these types on which to focus at specific grade levels in order to ensure that students receive instruction across a range of thinking and composing situations. Over time, students would become not only familiar, but at ease, with the demands of these kinds of writing assessed by high school. In an articulated multiyear program, students would read many examples of each kind of writing in their textbooks and in trade books. They would also frequently write each kind with the help of peers and teachers.

The state assessment of writing tests only a fraction of the number of kinds of writing students need to know how to do. Restricting instruction and opportunity to only the kinds assessed would be an unfortunate constraint on curriculum. By encouraging a broad variety of purposes in writing, teachers help students understand how the kinds of writing link to and define each other.

Because the state assessment measures achievement rather than placement on a scale, it is especially useful to schools and districts for assessing the outcomes of instruction.

Resources for Staff Development

The California Department of Education, in cooperation with the California Writing Project and the California Literature Project, offers a variety of assistance material and staff development opportunities. Descriptions of some of the available resources follow.

Writing Guides. A writing guide has been prepared for each kind of writing included in the state writing assessment. Each guide contains an overview of the type of writing, sample prompts, suggestions for teaching this type of writing, examples of student-written essays, an example of one student's writing process from prewriting to editing, and a reading list of published writing of this type.

Other Printed Materials. In addition to the frameworks and the *Model Curriculum Standards, Grades Nine through Twelve*, the *Handbook for Planning an Effective Writing Program* has been published by the California Department of Education. This handbook provides specific rationales and activities as well as reviews of relevant research for schools to use in upgrading their writing instruction across the curriculum. *Practical Ideas for Teaching Writing as a Process*, by teachers in the California Writing Project, features classroom-tested strategies and activities. Information about purchasing these publications, as well as others published by the Department, may be found at the back of this document.

Year-round Teacher Training and Summer Institutes. The California Writing Project (CWP) provides staff development during each summer and school year for teachers, kindergarten through university, at 16 sites statewide. The training offered includes the teaching of writing generally and the state assessment of writing specifically. These programs are in addition to the workshop series in teaching writing for teachers across the curriculum, in on-site, district, or cross-district groups. Information about the CWP is available from local site directors or the CWP Director, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, California 94720.

The California Literature Project (CLP) provides summer institutes and two years of follow-up for teachers of English–language arts, K-12, with special attention to the *English–Language Arts Framework* and such support documents as the model curriculum standards, and the K-8 guides in this subject area. CLP teacher leaders, at 10 sites throughout the state, conduct curriculum development workshops that include instructional materials and methods reflected in the state writing assessment. This series is an addition to the other CLP school, district, and regional staff development activities related to implementation of the *English–Language Arts Framework, K-12*.

High School Writing Guide

Autobiographical Incident

Autobiographical incident, a narrative focusing on a particular event in a writer's life, is central to personal writing. Although it exists as a definitive essay type by itself, it also contributes to other kinds of writing: report of information, speculation about causes or effects, interpretation, evaluation, observational essay, and controversial issue all draw on a range of experiences, individual and societal, from the perspective of a writer's own life.

Importance of Autobiographical Incident

Autobiographical writing is a respected literary genre, with a long history of development and refinement. Personal narrative is currently receiving renewed attention, both from literary theorists and psychologists, as an important part of the fabric of literature. Challenging in conception and demanding in development, writing about personal experience utilizes a writer's most finely honed ability to construct and convey meaning.

The autobiographical incident forms the basis for a great deal of personal writing in letters, diaries, and journals. It is probably the earliest form of writing taught in the schools, and it remains a vital part of the curriculum through college and graduate school. As teachers learn more and more about the power of narrative and its central role in learning, they have come to value the production of well-crafted autobiographical incidents in subjects as diverse as botanical research, response to literature, and history as a record of human experiences.

If the essence of education is learning from experience, the autobiographical incident becomes an important tool with which to examine experience and to discover and evaluate the lessons it offers. As writers identify a particular occasion, recall incidents pertinent to a prevailing theme for that time, and craft these thoughts into a coherent account, they construct meaning for themselves. Real learning emerges from sorting, analyzing, and evaluating the stuff of everyday life. Through examining a personal experience critically and carefully, writers develop a fuller sense of their own identity and their own power as thinking, feeling human beings.

Characteristics of Autobiographical Incident

The autobiographical incident is a narrative about a specific occurrence in a writer's life. It takes place in a short period of time—a day or two, perhaps minutes or a few hours. It includes specific sensory detail. The sequence of action within the narrative is clear; the significance for the writer is also apparent either from the narrative itself or the interpretation that the writer gives. An autobiographical incident revealed in

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rich sensory detail allows the reader to experience events and share feelings with a writer.

Criteria for an exemplary autobiographical incident essay focus on the incident, its context, and its significance.

Incident

The essay centers on one well-told incident (an incident is an event that occurs in a few minutes, a few hours, or perhaps a day) narrated coherently.

The incident is realized dramatically. The writer uses a wide range of descriptive strategies with sophistication and control. The following are some of the strategies the writer may employ:

- Naming (specific names of people or objects, quantities, numbers)
- Visual details of scene, objects, or people (size, colors, shapes, features, dress)
- Sounds or smells of the scene
- Specific narrative action (movements, gestures, postures, expressions)
- Dialogue
- Interior monologue
- Expression of remembered feelings or insights at the time of the incident
- Slowing the pace to elaborate the central moment in the incident
- Suspense or tension
- Surprise
- Comparison or contrast to other scenes or people

Context

The writer orients the reader by describing scene, people, and events. The writer carefully selects details to provide a background for the central incident. An appropriate balance is achieved between the contextual orientation of the reader and the narration of the incident.

Significance

The writer implies or states the personal significance of the incident. The impact of the incident is clear, and insights are well integrated into the narration.

Exemplary Student Essays

This essay by Gloria Morales was written as part of a longer project containing a series of "Portraits." In this essay, an account of her memory of her grandfather's death, she focuses on the externals—the small, seemingly extraneous details that remain vivid when we recall moments of deep impact on our lives. There is no sentimentalizing here, only the almost frivolous treatment that, paradoxically, signifies the loss.

I'm writing down the details of my life so I can forget them.

– Gloria Morales

My mother was giving one of her infamous dinner parties, which meant she spent the whole day in the kitchen, apron around her waist, hair tied neatly back, sweat coursing down her forehead and neck. This also meant her temper would be abnormally short and quick.

[The writer immediately orients the reader to the scene of the incident.]

Then, at about five o'clock, she would disappear into her bedroom and adjoining bath, with strict instructions to me ("Don't let anything boil over—when the lid of the brown pot begins to rattle, lower it to simmer."), and emerge an hour later, smelling feminine and looking rich with her hair up and dangly filigree earrings swinging beside her perfumed neck.

[Employs a wide range of descriptive strategies—naming, dialogue, sights, sounds, and smells of the scene.]

People arrived: my father's boss and his wife, looking pregnant and uncomfortable; our next door neighbors, a little nervous about leaving the baby at home, although they lived so close they would hear the child if she so much as snored; my mother's best friend, looking equally as sophisticated as mom; a single "friend" of my parents, undoubtedly meant for mom's girlfriend; and my grandparents, who lived with us and were all dressed up. Although grandma and grandpa were in their best, they looked strangely out of place. Grandma wore a sequined blouse from long, long ago, saying it still looked as good as it did when she last wore it 40 years ago. Grandpa was in a nice grey suit. I thought the suit was nice simply because it was all wrinkled, I felt comfortable around him.

[Presents visual details of the people and the scene with control and sophistication.]

Grandpa had suffered a stroke two years before, and the last year had been the hardest. His mind was still there. It shone through occasionally with a light of recognition in his dulled eyes. I could remember, just months before, losing my temper because, after persuading grandpa to color in my coloring books with me, he colored in a picture of a dog green. I always colored things in my coloring books the

colors they should be, and I had wanted a brown, black or white dog, not a green one. Besides, green was my least favorite color of the 64 in the box.

[Using carefully chosen details, the writer provides psychological and physical background for the incident.]

Grandpa's left side was paralyzed, a result of the stroke, and he really couldn't walk. My grandma loves him dearly; this we all knew. But grandma's temper was sometimes fiery, and her patience thin. Occasionally, we'd catch her about to hit grandpa, or worse, we'd get there too late, and she'd already have hit him, and be crying because he was defenseless and mute. Late at night, I'd sometimes hear her crying and talking to him, rambling on and on about how sorry she was for losing her temper, for hitting him, for making him walk when she knew he really shouldn't, for doing one in a million terrible things to him she never seemed to be able to stop herself from doing.

[Background of relationship presented with specific illustrations.]

Anyway, tonight they weren't fighting, no one was being mean, and everyone looked pretty.

[The writer brings us back to the present moment with an effective transition.]

The party went well, I thought. Dinner had been served, the meal my mother had slaved over, and of course, had come out perfect, despite the fact that I had forgotten all about the lid of the brown pot during a game of jacks, and had nearly ruined the whole thing.

The conversation was witty and intellectual; in other words, it was about a million miles over my head, and none of the "adorable" jokes made were understood by me, and I had to laugh anyway, just so not to feel left out.

[Conveys remembered feelings and insights at the time of the incident.]

I watched my grandfather: he lifted a french fry to his mouth and bit in. French fries were one of the few things left that he would eat without being forced to do so, like me. I loved french fries! That was one thing he and I really had in common, and I adored him for it. I looked away for a second. It was one of those seconds that in stories always seems to take hours. But it was only a second. I looked down at my food, making sure that I wasn't spilling and leaving myself open to comments about bad manners, when I heard this terrible choking noise, but it seemed far, far away. I thought for an instant that someone had left the garbage disposal on in the kitchen, or that the neighbor's "precious" next door was heaving her guts up.

[Propels narrative action using concrete details. Moves narrative effectively and irresistibly toward a central moment (essay realized dramatically).]

But no—when I looked up it was my grandfather's face that had gone white, his eyes that watered, his lips that formed silent cries for help.

For the next half hour, I saw only glimpses of reality: my mother jumping to my grandfather's side; my grandmother turning the oddest shade of green; my mom calling an ambulance; the guests not knowing where to look; my father taking my grandfather to bed to rest after the heart attack, and then the paramedics arriving. Once the ambulance arrived, I knew, deep down, it was futile. Then the oddest sense of needing to know came over me—I had to see him one last time. So I ran to the back bedroom.

[Manages pacing skillfully to accommodate change in time and mood.]

There he was, lying in the center of his bed. My mother was at the foot of the bed, moaning; my grandmother sagged next to her. On either side of the bed were blue-shirted paramedics. They were holding two large plates to my grandfather's chest—his shirt had been ripped wide. Over and over and over again, they held the plates to his chest and made his whole body jump in the air, convulsing and twisting in agony, while my mother pleaded with them to stop.

I ran from the room. My grandfather wasn't really in there. Maybe I'd find him in the dining room. But no, there were only the cold plates of food in there. I spied something—the last piece of my grandfather I'd ever see: the french fry he'd bitten into before the attack. There it was, cold and absurd, bitten firmly in half by the even rows of his dentures. Suddenly, that french fry became my whole world, forever it seemed, I stared at it. Then, all at once, I realized, more than the green dog, more than his rocking chair on the porch, more than his wrinkled grey suit, the french fry was the most important mark on the world my grandfather ever made—simply because it was his last.

[Integrates impact and significance into the details of the narration. Provides satisfying closure rich with sensory detail.]

The next essay, by Aaron Best, is the end product of an assignment that evolved from the study of a piece of literature. Following the essay, annotated to mark illustrations of autobiographical incident characteristics, you will see the process that led to this final version.

First Memory

by Aaron Best

My very first memories from my childhood, unlike most people's, are not happy ones. They are not of

playing on the swings with my friends, throwing food at the teacher at snack, nor are they of playing catch with my father. In fact, it is just the opposite. My very first memory involves walking into a gigantic courtroom (everything seems to be gigantic when you are three years old) holding on to my mother's hand.

[Orients reader and provides background for the central incident.]

"Where are we going, Mommy? Are we going to see Daddy?" I asked as curiously as any child would do.

"Yes, Aaron, we are going to sĕe Daddy," my mother replied sadly.

My mother, my older brother, Graham, and I entered the large courtroom while I was still clutching my mother's hand. A large wooden desk sat against the back wall. It appeared like a mountain against my infantile body and I was shocked by the god dressed in a black cloak who sat behind it. I remember the vast wooden floor beneath me which seemed to go on forever, and I remember the ancient portraits of past heroes on the wall; their proud and stout looks offered me little sympathy for the pain to come.

[Uses a wide range of descriptive strategies, including visual details of the scene, comparison, dialogue, and expressions.]

After a short exploration of the building, I returned to my mother and brother and found that my father had finally arrived. I ran to him and held on to his legs for dear life.

"Hi, Daddy!" I yelled, not understanding the surrounding circumstances.

"Can you two boys please wait out in the waiting room. I need to discuss something with your parents for a couple of minutes," I heard God bellow in a loud and mighty voice. My brother, who was all grown up at the age of six, took my hand and led me through the revolving wooden door. Although I had no idea of what was happening to my parents, my brother, and my entire way of life that I was used to, I think my brother did. (Although I have never actually asked him to this day.) His sullen walk and gloomy face gave me my first clue—the clue that I caught years later that led me to believe that at the tender age of six, Graham knew that his entire way of life would be different too.

[Uses specific narrative action (movements, gestures, and postures). Provides expression of remembered feelings and insights of the moment.]

Suddenly, I saw the door swivel open slowly and I saw my father rush to the bathroom around the corner. I knew exactly where the bathroom was after sitting in the waiting room all that time.

Anyway, Graham followed my dad, and I, having nothing better to do, followed my brother. The big door opened to reveal a rather small, but infinitely clean and unartistic white bathroom. My father, dressed in a very stylish and very professional suit and tie, had his back turned towards the door and I remember hearing the echoes of his sobs vibrating from the walls. It still sends shivers down my back to think about it. Suddenly, he turned around, his big, brown eyes filled with tears, and he knelt for us to hug him. He seemed to be squeezing the life out of me with his big, muscular arms as both my brother and I felt the cold tears fall from his cheek onto ours.

[Conveys emotional quality of the scene using rich visual detail.]

Finally, after fifteen minutes of crying, we put ourselves together again, and Graham and I left. We got into the car, buckled our safety belts and didn't say a word the entire ride home. "What was Daddy so sad about?" I thought. "I'll ask him about it when I get home . . . ," but of course, I never got the chance. You see, what both my mother and father never explained to me was that my life from that point on would never be the same again. I would be torn from memories from my past, torn between two sets of parents, and torn between the lies that they would tell about each other. No one asked me how I felt. No one conferred with me to see if I objected. My life seemed to be ruined and I had no say in it whatsoever. But I've learned to live with my pain and forgive my parents, because even though they weren't always there for me, I want to be a good son and always be there for them whenever they need me. My only hope is that they both know how much I still love them both.

[Clearly integrates personal significance and impact of the incident into the narration.]

One Student's Writing Process

Overview of the Assignment

In this section we will follow Aaron Best's process in writing the preceding exemplary essay. This writing assignment was part of a larger unit in which the students were studying *The Secret Sharer*.[1]

In Aaron's responses to specific quotations from *The Secret Sharer*, he has begun to formulate the area of his own life that will become the focus for his paper.

"God only knows why they locked me in every night. To see some of their faces you'd have thought they were afraid I'd go about at night strangling

[1]Joseph Conrad, "The Secret Sharer," in *The Portable Conrad*. New York: Viking Press, 1975, pp. 648–699.

people. Am I a murdering brute? Do I look it?" (p.152)

The "secret sharer" in this story is experiencing a lack of acceptance from his peers. That seemed to be the most difficult struggle he had to deal with, and being a teenager, I can relate. Just about every teenager, at some point in their life, experiences the feeling of being an outcast and finds it hard to be accepted.

"My lack of excitement, of curiosity, of surprise, of any sort of profound interest, began to arouse his distrust." (p.166)

This has also been a struggle in my life. Even though I have tried to be a good listener and take a profound interest in other people's problems, my efforts sometimes are in vain. Without any "profound interest" on my part, usually there isn't any trust on their part. Without trust, there is no relationship, and I could be missing out on a potential friendship.

After quickwrites, discussions, and other activities focusing on the struggles of the characters in the novel, students wrote a short interpretive essay focusing on the significant struggles of the main characters. The focus of the characters in *The Secret Sharer* became the bridge to their own writing.

Here is Aaron's first draft:

My very first memories from my childhood, unlike most, are not happy ones. They are not of playing on the swings with my friends, throwing food at the teacher at snack, nor are they of playing catch with my father. In fact, it is just the opposite. My first memory involves walking into a gigantic courtroom (everything seems to be gigantic when you are three years old) holding on to my mother's hand.

"Where are we going, mommy? Are we going to see daddy?" I asked as curiously as any child would do.

"Yes, Aaron, we are going to see Daddy," my mother replied sadly.

My mother, my older brother Graham, and I entered the large courtroom while I was still clutching my mother's hand. A large wooden desk sat against the back wall. It appeared like a mountain against my infantile body and I was awed by the god dressed in a black cloak who sat behind it.

I remember the ancient portraits of past heroes on the wall; I remember the vast wooden floor beneath me which seemed to have no end, and their proud and stout look which offered me little sympathy for the pain to come.

After a short exploration of the building, I returned to my mother and brother and found that my father had come after all.

"Can you boys please wait outside?" I heard God say as I saw my father enter through the door.

Just then, my father walked in. I can still remember his disturbed face *looking down onto my brother and I. I ran to him and held on to his legs for dear life.*

"Hi Daddy!" I yelled, not understanding the surrounding circumstances.

"Can you two boys please wait out in the waiting room," I heard God say in a loud and mighty voice.

My brother who was all grown up at the age of six took my hand and led me through the revolving wooden door. Although I had no idea of what was happening, I think my brother did (although I've never actually asked him to this day).

We climbed up onto a bench and waited for a couple of months (remember! Everything's bigger when you are only three years old).

Suddenly, I saw the door swivel open slowly and I saw my father rush to the bathroom around the corner. I knew exactly where the bathroom was after ~~a month of~~ sitting in the waiting room all that time. After all, you can't expect a little child not to go to the bathroom in a whole month, now can you?

Anyway, my brother followed my dad and I, having nothing else to do, followed my brother. The big door opened to reveal a rather small, but infinitely clean and unartistic white bathroom. My father, dressed in a very stylish and very professional suit and tie, had his back turned towards the door and I remember hearing the echoes of his sobs vibrating off the walls. It still sends shivers down my back to think about it. Suddenly, he turned around, his big, brown eyes filled with tears, and he knelt for us to hug him. ~~He got down on his knees and we both rushed to him~~. He seemed to be squeezing the life out of me with his big, muscular arms as both me and my brother felt the cold tears fall from his cheek onto ours.

Finally, my brother and I left. We got into the car, buckled our safety belts, and didn't say a word the whole ride home. "What was daddy so sad about?" I thought. I'll ask him about it when I get home, but, of course, I never got the chance.

ADD CONCLUSION!

The students worked in pairs, alternating the roles of reader/responder. Each responder filled out the response guide. Aaron's responder, Irene Rodrigues, wrote the comments in the following response guide.

Autobiographical Incident

To the author: Please read your paper aloud to your editor. While reading, have a pencil handy to mark places that sound awkward to you. Often sentence errors become obvious to a writer when they are heard rather than just seen. After

reading your piece, hand this editing sheet and your paper to your editor.

To the editor: Please read your partner's paper carefully and answer the following questions thoughtfully.

(BE SURE TO USE COMPLETE SENTENCES—DO NOT USE "YES" OR "NO" TO ANSWER ANY OF THESE QUESTIONS!!)

Idea-Level Revision

1. Summarize the contents of this piece of writing in one or two sentences.
   Aaron's memories of his parents' divorce, feelings and all.

2. What do you like best about this piece of writing? Be specific!!
   The underlying humor that kind of distracts you from the sadness of the story.

3. Is there any part of this paper that seems out of order? How could the narrative be rearranged to make it more coherent? Identify why the order seems successful if you feel nothing should be rearranged.
   The order is good. Time is the essential factor in this story, and it follows it exactly.

4. Does the beginning of the story capture your interest? If it does, explain how. If you feel revision is needed in this area, suggest one or two ways the author might grab the reader's interest more concretely.
   Yes. It immediately gained my attention. It was vivid and humorous and I could relate it to my own life.

5. Do you feel the story is complete? Identify what you would like to hear more about if you feel this story is incomplete. Comment on what you like about the story line if you feel the author has been successful in giving the reader a complete story.
   Yes, it seems complete. The end was a little abrupt, but the story was complete.

6. Are there details which detract from the main focus of the story? Put a ** by any details which you feel detract and be ready to tell the author what more is needed to make this part of the paper more successful.

7. Are there places where more specificity is needed to help you picture the scene and the people? Suggest specific improvements where revision is needed. If none are needed, describe one instance where the author was particularly successful in this area.
   When the judge and courtroom scenario was described, I could practically see it.

8. Does the author use direct quotations and/or conversation to show the writer or people in the story more fully? Point to places where dialogue might be added to improve this piece of writing.
   Si, sufficient quotes. Any more and it would just seem like fillers.

9. Do some parts move too slowly or too fast? Explain!
   The waiting, although described in months, was only a sentence or two long.

10. A narrative should end with some sort of conclusion, rather than just stopping with the last event. This conclusion might tell what the author learned from the experience, how it changed or affected his or her life or how he or she felt about it. In other words, do you understand the significance of this incident in the writer's life? In the space below, tell what your author concluded from his experience. If you cannot see any conclusion, suggest what the author might add to complete the narrative.
    Conclusion +

Before handing in the final draft, students completed the following self-evaluation:

1. Put asterisks to denote the part of the paper you like the best. Explain why you chose this part of your paper.
2. Put parentheses around the part you like the least. Explain why.
3. What part was the hardest for you to write? Why?
4. What did you learn about yourself as a writer as you worked through this paper?
5. What might you do differently the next time you undertake a similar assignment?

Prewriting Strategies

The following kinds of generic activities can be used in prewriting:

- Clustering.
- Quickwrites.
- Venn Diagram – used to compare and then to initiate thinking about specific life experiences.
- Road maps or Lifelines of Students' Lives – Brainstorm numerous important events in a student's life and use graphics to illustrate these important lifetime memories. These events would be connected in a road map and then used to begin to focus on one specific memory.
- Sunshadow mandala – Use symbols from the sunshadow mandala to think about specific incidents associated with these symbols.
- Specific pieces of literature – *Models* (stories, poems, essays, etc.) are important in this type of writing. Some may be used as models, some as springboards.
- Remembered moments – Topics for prewriting activities might include times when students were surprised, courageous, frustrated, unkind, happy, embarrassed, proud.
- Role Play – Set up situations to remind students of past experiences.

Additional prewriting strategies appear in the other writing guides. Many of them are applicable to autobiographical incident.

Response and Revision

A revision session might involve discussion between or among pairs of students, small groups, or members of an entire class viewing a paper together on the overhead projector. These discussions should focus on the piece in an honest, supportive dialogue designed to highlight directions for improvement.

Suggestions for structuring these sessions include the following:

Incident

- An incident is a significant event that occurs in a few minutes, a few hours, or perhaps a day. Does the writer focus on a single incident? If so, summarize the incident in one sentence. If not, how might the writer focus on a single incident?
- What sensory details are particularly effective? Where might specific details of description or action improve the paper?
- Indicate to the writer where dialogue is used effectively. If dialogue is not used, suggest to the writer how he or she might use it.

Significance

- Why was the incident significant to the writer? How does the writer show the significance?
- How does the writer convey feelings about this experience? If needed, suggest ways that the writer might express feelings more effectively.

Context

- Describe how the writer locates the incident in a particular setting, orienting the reader to scene, people, and events.

Language

- What do you like best about this paper and why? Be specific.
- What puzzles or confuses the reader in this draft?
- Where might the draft be made clearer and more easily understood?
- What wording in the paper seems out of place or inappropriate?
- How well does the opening catch the reader's attention?
- How well was the reader's interest maintained?
- What changes would make the draft seem more direct, more honest, more personal?
- Where might the pace of the piece be slowed or quickened?
- Are there inconsistencies of tone? If so, what might be changed to obtain a more consistent tone?

Additional suggestions for response and revision appear in the other writing guides. Many of these strategies are appropriate for autobiographical incident.

Classroom Writing Assignments from Literature to Writing

All writing assignments should, of course, arise naturally out of the curriculum. An example of how the reading of an autobiography might lead to the writing of an autobiographical incident is chronicled below:

At the conclusion of an assignment in which each student reads an individually selected autobiography, chosen because of some interest that the author and student share, the teacher asks each student to select one incident in the life of the author. Students find such passages and, in pairs, share the incidents by reading aloud. The students then share with each other experiences in their own lives that in some way are recalled by the passages in the books.

Following the sharing, the teacher encourages the class to determine the characteristics of autobiographical incident, asking students for examples from their own authors' works as they discuss incident, significance of event, context, voice, and style.

Students move toward their own writing by following directions such as these:

- Describe the incident you selected.
- What was the importance of the incident to the author? (Was the importance stated or implied?)
- List one or two events in your own life that reading this incident suggested to you.
- Cluster or write briefly about each event you listed, noting details and stating the importance of the event to you.

The students then develop their initial draft(s). They continually share these drafts with their partners or with a larger response group, generating and responding to questions that will help them develop a strong autobiographical incident.

Some options for publishing completed autobiographical incidents include the following:

- Students join other response groups and read their autobiographical incidents to each other.
- The teacher collects the essays and selects passages from each to read to the class.
- The students exchange their essays with another class doing a similar assignment; students comment in writing to each original writer about the incident.
- The students publish a class book featuring their autobiographical incidents.

This sequence of strategies, just one possible scenario, is appropriate in subjects across the curriculum. Sample assignments for several subject matter areas follow.

Language Arts

Writing Situation. Read the following poem. Focus on what the boy did and why you think he may have done it.

Incendiary[2]

by Vernon Scannell

That one small boy with a face like pallid cheese
And burntout little eyes could make a blaze
As brazen, fierce and huge, as red and gold

And zany yellow as the one that spoiled
Three thousand guinea's worth of property
And crops at Godwin's farm on Saturday
Is frightening—as fact and metaphor:
  An ordinary match intended for
The lighting of a pipe or kitchen fire
  Misused may set a whole menagerie
Of flame-fanged tigers roaring hungrily.
And frightening too, that one small boy should set
The sky on fire and choke the stars to heat
Such skinny limbs and such a little heart
Which would have been content with one warm kiss
Had there been anyone to offer this.

Directions for Writing. To understand what motivated the boy, remember a time in your life when you did something that you knew was wrong. Write an essay about that incident. Include details that will help your readers see the situation, the characters, and what happened. They will also want to know why you acted as you did and what you feel about the incident now.

Insulation

Writing Situation. Insulation, the fiberglass or cellulose builders put in houses during construc-

[2]Vernon Scannell, "Incendiary," in *Oxford Book of Contemparary Verses (1945–1980).* New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

tion to make them more comfortable and energy-efficient, has a more universal meaning as well. It denotes a state where things are shielded, separated, or placed in detachment. Increasingly, it seems, as our society grows more complex, that various forms of insulation—physical, psychological, cultural—become more important and sophisticated.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay about an incident in which you felt insulated in some way. Include the kind of details that will help your reader visualize the situation and see what happened and who was involved. Tell how you felt at the time of the incident and how you feel about it now.

A Change in My Life

Writing Situation. Life is full of changes. You change schools, change teachers, acquire new friends, shift family relationships, or undertake a new job.

Directions for Writing. Write about an incident in which you experienced an important change in your life. The change might have involved a geographic location, a family situation, a physical condition, or a personal life. Include details that will help your readers visualize the situation to see who was involved and what happened.

Empathy

Writing Situation. You have been thinking about your developing awareness of others. As you mature you have become more aware of others' feelings.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay about one specific incident in which you became more aware of another's feelings. The other being might be a person your own age, an adult, or even an animal. Explain the incident in detail so that your readers can picture what happened. Include details that will help your readers visualize the situation and see what happened and who was involved.

My Friend

Writing Situation. As an end-of-the-year writing project, your English teacher has assigned an autobiography with specific chapters. One chapter, entitled "Friends," deals with a particular incident when you discovered something about friendship.

Directions for Writing. Write about an incident that revealed to you that a particular person either was or was not a real friend. Focus on the central moment when you discovered that this person either was or was not a real friend. Include details that will help your readers visualize the situation and see what happened and who was involved.

Write about a time when you consciously took a stand. (Use with Antigone.)

Lies

Writing Situation. Think about the following two quotations about lies:

"I cannot tell a lie." (George Washington)

"I'm the best liar I ever knew." (Holden Caulfield)

Directions for Writing. Write about a time when you made a deliberate decision to lie or to tell the truth. Include details that will help your reader see the situation and understand both the reasons for your decision and the results.

History–Social Science

Writing Situation. In your history class you are studying the effects of government on our lives, how it affects us, sometimes in small ways (a stoplight making us late), sometimes in more important ways (when your employer discovered that your salary had to be raised to meet minimum wage requirements).

Directions for Writing. Write about an incident when government affected your life. Be sure to tell where you were, what happened, who was involved, and how you were affected. Include details that will help readers understand the situation and see what happened and who was involved.

How to Survive High School

Writing Situation. The first year in high school is usually a difficult one. Your student government adviser is publishing a book called "How to Survive in High School," to be sent to junior high school students in your school district. The adviser wants to print senior essays about incidents that happened early in students' high school experiences.

Directions for Writing. Write about an incident in your early high school years that taught you something about surviving in school. Be sure to include details that will help readers visualize the situation and see what happened and who was involved. Tell your readers how you felt at the time and what you learned from the experience.

Take a Stand

Writing Situation. There is a lot in the news about people picketing and taking stands to publicize their own feelings about an issue.

Directions for Writing. Write of a time in your life when you consciously and deliberately decided to take a position on something. This might be a time when you took a stand about a social or a political issue, or it might be a time when you stood up for your rights in your family or at school.

Free Speech

Writing Situation. The First Amendment guarantees all Americans the right to free speech. Think about what the right to free speech means to you.

Directions for Writing. Write about a time when you felt that your First Amendment rights were violated or when you demanded your own right to speak freely.

Peaceful Solutions

Writing Situation. The news is often full of examples of people and even countries trying to bring peace to other people or countries.

Directions for Writing. Write about a time in your own life when you have tried to find a peaceful solution to a conflict. This might be a time when you tried to help others solve a problem, or it might be a time when you found a peaceful solution to a potentially explosive situation of your own.

Write about a time when you built something using levers, pulleys, and/or an inclined plane.

An Illness

Write about a time when you were ill. Maybe you had to go to the hospital, stayed home from school for a few days, or perhaps had to go to school anyway. Describe your symptoms, how you felt, what you looked like, and what was done to make you feel better.

Newton's Law

Writing Situation. Newton's Third Law states "For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction."

Directions for Writing. Write about a time when you experienced Newton's law in action. This might be a time when something you did caused a reaction, or it might be a time when something or someone caused you to react.

Natural Phenomena

Writing Situation. Think about a time when you experienced a startling natural phenomenon. You might have been in an earthquake or a tornado. You might have experienced a particularly dramatic storm or a sudden change of weather. Perhaps you have seen a mudslide, avalanche, or fire.

Directions for Writing. Write about a time when you experienced or read about a natural phenomenon. Be sure to include details that will help your reader to visualize the situation and to see who was involved. Show how you felt at the time and how you feel about the incident now.

My Science Task Force

Writing Situation. Scientific developments are frequently credited to a single individual. However, many scientific endeavors involve collaboration.

Directions for Writing. Write about a time when you were involved in a collaborative effort to complete a science task, experiment, or project.

Mathematics

Writing Situation. Think about a time when you achieved an academic or personal goal through hard work and perseverance. Perhaps it was a history or community project or another challenging activity.

Directions for Writing. Write about a time when you struggled to solve a significantly complex mathematics problem for a particular purpose in class or for your own needs.

The Value of Mathematics

Writing Situation. Some students question the value of some of the subjects taught in school.

Directions for Writing. Write about a time you realized that mathematics was either a valuable and practical part of your educational career or one about which you see little relevance.

Write about either a positive or negative experience in a mathematics class.

Home Economics

Writing Situation. Many people love to cook, and may others try to avoid cooking at all costs. Think about your experiences as a cook.

Directions for Writing. Write about an incident involving a cooking success or failure. Be sure to include details from the scene to express the event's degree of success or failure.

Additional Exemplary Student Essays

Kyeong Lee moved to the United States from Korea at age fifteen. Two years before he wrote "The Red Hill," he spoke practically no English. In the telling of this powerful incident in his life, Kyeong relies on the memory of the conversation he had with a person unidentified to the audience. The power rests in the total focus of the dialogue, a short paragraph of narration, and a moving final paragraph that carries all the significance of this experience. This kind of autobiographical writing represents the opposite extreme from the rambling, discursive narrative that is typical of incidents recounted in many memoirs. It is closer to poetry, but still fulfills the requirements of autobiographical incident.

The Red Hill

by Kyeong Lee

" . . . It wasn't my fault, please don't blame me, for heaven's sake! We were only hungry . . . ."

The stream was strewn with splinters of silver, twinkling as it flowed, and, like mother's breast, the earth was warm and soft under our bare feet.

" . . . Yes, I know! He was my best friend. Don't you think . . . ."

There was a boy nicknamed Pirate. He was the most notorious boy in the whole village; his eyes were always filled with a little lively malice . . . and he liked me.

" . . . Of course I've been warned about it. But it hasn't happened for decades. How do you expect . . . ."

Digging up arrowroots was fun; the labor always paid back. Sweet, bitter taste of arrowroots lasts long with the mild smell of earth.

" . . . We found lots of 'em under the big oak tree. And then he . . . ."

I was thrown away by a galvanic force as if I were hit by a giant. The stench of gunpowder filled the air. Landmine! The chill crept along my backbone.

" . . . He was dead! Like a rat, flung on a cement floor, he lay in blood . . . ."

That night I heard the mountain crying. The groans and the sorrow of the old hill transmitted through my whole body, wetting my soul with grief. I opened the window, and I saw the pale moon, shimmering like a skull.

In "Different Wavelengths," Michael Landreth tells his story almost completely through dialogue. The reader is trusted to make the connection between the action of the incident and the subject of the conversation.

Different Wavelengths

by Michael Landreth

"That physics chapter is starting to get interesting, isn't it, Tom," I said as I tried to pedal a bit faster up the small incline of the Bay Farm Island Bridge.

"Yeah," Tom panted as he labored up the incline in the wrong gear. "Although I haven't finished the chapter yet."

"Neither have I, but what I have read is pretty good. You know, Tom, if you would down-shift when you start riding uphill, things would be a lot easier. In fact, it seems like you spend a great deal of time in the higher gears when it's much easier to down-shift and pedal faster."

"I know, I'm just used to staying in one gear. Some of the stuff in the chapter is a little hard to get used to, isn't it?"

"I know what you mean. I've never given a lot of thought to light and color and it's hard to believe that color is just a property of an object to reflect a particular wavelength of light. In fact, it's even harder to think of light as electromagnetic waves."

"What about trying to think of sound as compression waves in air?"

"The physics definition of color does have a number of advantages. Perhaps colors affect us the way they do because of their wavelength. Maybe we think of certain colors as cool or hot because of the way their wavelengths affect our eyes. We had better head back to the bridge, I have some homework to do tonight."

"OK. I wonder why the state has decided to dress convicts in those technicolor jumpsuits? It seems to me that orange would make them angry instead of serene," said Tom as we labored up the incline again.

"I think it's a form of punishment. They want to try to embarrass them into submission."

After about five nearly impossible pedal-strokes, Tom finally decided to take my advice and down-shift.

Guidelines for Writing Prompts for Autobiographical Incident

Autobiographical incident writing requires students to narrate vividly a remembered incident of significance in their lives. Writers must orient readers to the incident, present the scene and other people who were present, and tell an engaging story. The story may include dialogue, movement, or gestures, names of people or objects, and sensory details. Writers describe their feelings, understandings, or reflections at the time of the incident; they may also evaluate the incident from their present perspective, implying or stating its significance in their lives.

Following are guidelines for drafting the writing situation and directions for writing for autobiographical incident prompts. Prompts that model these guidelines are included.

Writing Situation

Identify a particular type of incident (a challenge, a success or achievement, a time when the writer acted responsibly or took a stand). In two to four sentences, describe the type of incident, enabling all students to recognize it readily and making it seem an inviting subject. (Identifying a *type* of incident leaves to the student the choice of a particular incident of that type to write about.) You might include examples of three or four typical particular incidents of the type to get students started thinking about a subject. Then invite students to think about possible incidents and ask them to write about one that was important to them in some way. Use the words *incident* or *incidents*.

In a separate brief paragraph of two or three sentences, you may give students an occasion or motive to write. For example, autobiographical writing might arise from reading or activities in history or English classes; or the occasion could be a class or school publication or a family event where each person shares a personally meaningful story. For this type of writing, however, it also seems appropriate merely to refer to "readers" in the directions for writing. Should that be your decision for the prompt you are drafting, then you would not have a separate paragraph about occasion, motive, or readers in the writing situation.

Directions for Writing

Begin the directions, "Write about . . ." or "Write about an incident in which you . . ." [or "one time when you . . ."]. In this sentence or the next you will want to use the word *incident*. After the sentence with the word *incident*, define incident in parentheses as follows: (An incident is an event that occurs in a few minutes, a few hours, or perhaps in a day.) You may want to use the words *show, describe, present, details, specifics, see*, or *imagine*. You may also want to use the phrase *tell what happened*. Do not lead the student by suggesting any other rhetorical features of autobiographical incident. Avoid the word *story* and do not mention remembered feelings or current feelings.

Conclude the directions with a sentence or sentences beginning "Your readers [or a particular reader] will want to know . . ." and/or "Help your readers [or a particular reader] . . ." and ending "why the incident was significant for you."

Keep sentences relatively brief and the vocabulary accessible. Title the prompt in a way that keeps students' focus on the writing situation.

Note: These guidelines should not constrain classroom writing assignments or student writing projects. Good classroom assignments and projects may share certain features of the testing prompts—purposefulness, specific readers, suggestions about strategies—but classroom assignments need not observe the constraints on test prompts. These guidelines are designed solely to enable teachers to write prompts for assessment purposes.

Sample Prompts for a Testing Situation

This section presents several test prompts. In format and development, each is like actual writing assessment prompts. Since we know that familiarity with a test's format and time allotment improves students' confidence and performance, we recommend that students have one or two experiences with writing sample prompts under test conditions.

We believe, however, that students' writing achievement cannot improve if students practice only test prompts. Achievement will improve only if students compose and revise in realistic writing situations in the context of their total classroom experience.

An Incident Involving a Group

Writing Situation. We spend a lot of time in various kinds of groups: in class, with friends, with our families, on teams, and in clubs, among other groups. Occasionally, something really memorable happens when we are in a group. Much later, we can easily recall the details, who was there, and how the event unfolded.

Your social science teacher has asked you to write an essay about a memorable incident involving a group. Your class will be reading these essays out loud to each other. Think about the times when you have been involved with groups, and choose one incident to write about.

Directions for Writing. Write about a memorable incident in your life that involved a group. (An incident is an event that occurs in a few minutes, a few hours, or perhaps in a day.) Help your teacher and the other students understand what was important to you about this experience. Tell what happened and give specific details that will make the incident come alive for readers.

A Time You Taught Someone

Writing Situation. People often say that you learn more about something when you try to teach it to someone else. There are probably times when you have acted as a teacher. For example, you might have taught a younger brother or sister how to skate or ride a bike or coached a friend who was learning a sport. Or you may have helped someone understand how to work a difficult problem in mathematics or shown someone how to fix something.

Your English teacher has asked you to write an essay about a time when you learned something by teaching someone else. Think about the teaching experiences you have had and choose one you remember well to write about.

Directions for Writing. Write about one time when you learned something by teaching someone. Be sure to tell what happened and to give the specific details that will make the incident come alive for your teacher. (An incident is an event that takes place in a few minutes, a few hours, or perhaps a day.) You want to focus on what *you* learned or experienced, not simply what you taught the other person.

Essays Written for the State Assessment

High-range Achievement

This writer places us in the midst of an event with the very first word. Within moments "we are forging ahead, pushing aside the branches of wayward greenery," "fighting our way through the muck and mud," and experiencing the "invigoratingly brisk" air. After setting the context of the "quest" for a perfect Christmas tree, this writer skillfully creates tension and suspense through a realistic use of dialogue. In fact, much of the action unfolds in dialogue. Comparisons abound. Various trees are classified. Details such as "the most sacred of weapons—the Uncle John's Christmas Tree

Farm Saw"—and somewhat unusual parenthetical remarks add to the color and humor of the essay. After finally choosing the perfect tree and waving goodbye to other families, the writer slows the pace of this essay to reflect on the significance of the incident. The writer's reflection is sensitive and even a bit hopeful. "This is our Christmas tradition, one I tell myself that my own children will some day share. Well, maybe not, but it's a nice thought." This paper represents a fine achievement for a student to have completed in 45 minutes.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp, stomp, stomp, stomp, stomp, tramp, tramp, stomp, stomp, tramp, tramp, stomp! Here we are, forging ahead, pushing aside the branches of wayward greenery that stand in our path, fighting our way through the muck and mud. We disregard unloyal thoughts of warmth and comfort; they have no place here. Chilling air? Nay. It is invigoratingly brisk. Mosquitos and gnats a constant bother? Never! Such petty discomforts build character. What time have we to complain? None at all. For we are on (place Indiana Jones adventure music here. In case of shortage of such music, proclaim loudly, "Dun dah dah Dun!") a quest (to be said reverently).

Not in the deepest jungles of South America would you find foliage as thick and green as here. Never, in the polar climes of the Arctic, would the very breath from your lips be as frosty white. Even in the swamps of the Amazon you could not find terrain so challenging as here. Where can one find this ideal location for a quest? Why, Uncle John's Christmas Tree Farm, of course.

Yes, here we are, as we have been for years past, and shall be for years to come, at Uncle John's in search of: (to be spoken into an echo chamber or, if unavailable, off the highest Grand Canyon summit) the perfect Christmas tree. It is I, my five younger sisters and brothers, Mom, Aunt Jeanette, and of course, bringing up the rear and holding the most sacred of weapons—the Uncle John's Christmas Tree Farm Saw—is dear ol' Dad.

(Fade in voices)

"Look! Over there! Look how tall it is. Look how bushy."

"Looks a little lopsided to me. What do you think?"

"Lopsided? I don't think so. Mom, does it look lopsided to you?"

"I can't tell. What do you think, honey?"

"Grumble, grumble, grunt, grunt."

"Your father thinks it's lopsided. Let's move on."

"Hey, how 'bout this one?"

(Voices fade out)

And so the search continues. Finally, hours later, some sort of consensus is found.

(Fade in voices)

"But there's a bald spot over on this side."

"We'll turn that side to the wall. No one will know."

"I'll know."

"Grumble, grumble, grunt, grunt."

"Your father likes it. Now hush before I tell Santa how bad you're being."

(Silence)

(Voices fade out)

After much discussion on from which angle to cut, Dad begins to pull the saw back and forth over the glorious trunk.

(Sound of lumberjack crying Timber, large cracking sound, and crashing noise to be inserted here.)

Drag, drag, drag, drag, pull, pull, pull, pull, drag, drag, pull, pull, drag, drag, pull.

(Voice fades in)

"Why lookie here, lookie here." (to be said in a jolly, half-drunk Santa-type voice) "Why, you've got the biggest tree on the lot!" It's Uncle John! *"That'll be $25 please. Do you need help loading it up?"*

(Voice fades out)

With smiles on our faces, noses red from the cold, and fingers sticky from the complimentary candy canes Uncle John gave us, we pull away from the lot, our brand-new, extra special, absolutely perfect Christmas tree swaying precariously on the roof. We wave goodbye to other families who have also found trees, though, of course, none so lovely as ours, and to Uncle John who smiles, before saying to the couple before him "Why lookie here, lookie here . . . you've got the biggest one on the lot!" This is our Christmas tradition, one I tell myself that my own children will someday share. Well, maybe not, but it's a nice thought.

The next paper provides an example of a high rhetorical score even though the writer still has difficulties with syntax and usage. There is a strong commitment to the telling of the incident, with specific details and action, followed by a moving statement of the effect of this incident on the writer's feelings about school.

I felt myself blushing and my heart aching from humiliation. The entire class was laughing at me, because I could not pronounce a word correctly.

It occurred when I was a fourth grade student in my class. I was called upon by the teacher to tell my classmates what I had done over the weekend. I spoke as I recalled the events with enthusiasm. Though I had only lived in this country for a little less than two years, I enunciated clearly and tried to pronounce well, also. The teacher suddenly interrupted when I came to a part when I was excitedly saying I had played tennis with my brothers. The interjection was "not pray*; you* played *tennis." The whole class started giggling contemptuously to which*

I did not know how to react. Though I felt waves of humiliation washing my reminiscence away, I helplessly tried to defend myself that I said "played" instead of "prayed," hoping that the teacher would save the day, but the great expectation was shattered when she once again confirmed that I said "prayed." The laughter became greater as I looked at my teacher's malicious visage, and there I stood in middle of a class helplessly.

Since then I have become very reticent and laconic in all my classes. I dread the days when I have to give my speeches. Otherwise I'm quite frank, though it took many years to heal the wound to a point where I could speak at all.

Mid-range Achievement

This writer sets his incident thoroughly, using specific details of time, place, and circumstance. He relates the incident with a similar level of specificity, re-creating the actions and the dialogue. Then he understates the result of his rash response to the cousin's challenge, establishing the significance of his experience in a final sentence.

The summer that I was ten, my cousin Harold came to stay with my family while his parents went on an extensive European tour. Since he couldn't stay in my sister's room, and he didn't much like the looks of the couch, he decided that he would stay in my room. I objected, on the grounds that the last time Harold had stayed with me he had rendered at least 75% of my toys non-recognizable, let alone disfunctional, but I was quickly silenced by my mother. I gave up the fight and allowed Harold to sleep on the floor under my desk.

On the first day of his visit, I sat on my bed reading a book while Harold busily contented himself with destroying the best of my Matchbox car collection. I glanced down and noticed that he had fished a large, green tin out of his pocket and was snapping his finger on the back. I inquired as to its contents, and he told me it was "chew" and that all real men on the Oklahoma plains used it. He took a small pinch and put it in his mouth. From the expression on his face, it looked to be the most enjoyable experience of his life. He shoved it in my face with the order to "take a dip." I look a large pinch and examined it. It was the most foul-looking substance I had ever encountered. "I don't think I want any," I said cautiously.

He looked at me with the disdain I had anticipated. "You're lame."

If there was one insult I could not deal with, that was it. I popped the wad into my mouth. "Now what?"

"Swallow it," he said.

Harold and I never were good friends afterwards. I never forgave him for the agony he put me through, and he never forgave me for sticking his head into the toilet after my stomach had recovered.

That incident taught me a valuable lesson about going against my own conscience.

Low-range Achievement

This response uses minimal description of the specific incident. The composition is underdeveloped with a brief introduction and a one-sentence incident.

The government regulations on taxes effect me every day that I buy something or pick up my pay check. I think we pay enough taxes on products so why do they take it out of our salary? I would get $20 more a week if they didn't take out taxes. Taxes had an effect on me yesterday. I was at Sears buying some tools and I couldn't because of taxes.

Published Examples of Autobiographical Incident

from *Growing Up*[3]
by Russell Baker

When our class was assigned to Mr. Fleagle for third-year English I anticipated another grim year in that dreariest of subjects. Mr. Fleagle was notorious among City students for dullness and inability to inspire. He was said to be stuffy, dull, and hopelessly out of date. To me he looked to be sixty or seventy and prim to a fault. He wore primly severe eyeglasses, his wavy hair was primly cut and primly combed. He wore prim vested suits with neckties blocked primly against the collar buttons of his primly starched white shirts. He had a primly pointed jaw, a primly straight nose, and a prim manner of speaking that was so correct, so gentlemanly, that he seemed a comic antique.

I anticipated a listless, unfruitful year with Mr. Fleagle and for a long time was not disappointed. We read "Macbeth." Mr. Fleagle loved Macbeth and wanted us to love it too, but he lacked the gift of infecting others with his own passion. He tried to convey the murderous ferocity of Lady Macbeth one day by reading aloud the passage that concludes

> . . . I have given suck, and know
> How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks
> me.
> I would, while it was smiling in my face,

[3]Russell Baker, *Growing Up*. New York: New American Library, 1984.

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Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums . . . .

The idea of prim Mr. Fleagle plucking his nipple from boneless gums was too much for the class. We burst into gasps of irrepressible snickering. Mr. Fleagle stopped.

"There is nothing funny, boys, about giving suck to a babe. It is the—the very essence of motherhood, don't you see."

He constantly sprinkled his sentences with "don't you see." It wasn't a question but an exclamation of mild surprise at our ignorance. "Your pronoun needs an antecedent, don't you see," he would say, very primly. "The purpose of the Porter's scene, boys, is to provide comic relief from the horror, don't you see."

Late in the year we tackled the informal essay. "The essay, don't you see, is the . . . ." My mind went numb. Of all forms of writing, none seemed so boring as the essay. Naturally we would have to write informal essays. Mr. Fleagle distributed a homework sheet offering us a choice of topics. None was quite so simpleminded as "What I Did on My Summer Vacation," but most seemed to be almost as dull. I took the list home and dawdled until the night before the essay was due. Sprawled on the sofa, I finally faced up to the grim task, took the list out of my notebook, and scanned it. The topic on which my eye stopped was "The Art of Eating Spaghetti."

This title produced an extraordinary sequence of mental images. Surging up out of the depths of memory came a vivid recollection of a night in Belleville when all of us were seated around the supper table—Uncle Allen, my mother, Uncle Charlie, Doris, Uncle Hal—and Aunt Pat served spaghetti for supper. Spaghetti was an exotic treat in those days. Neither Doris nor I had ever eaten spaghetti, and none of the adults had enough experience to be good at it. All the good humor of Uncle Allen's house reawoke in my mind as I recalled the laughing arguments we had that night about the socially respectable method for moving spaghetti from plate to mouth.

Suddenly I wanted to write about that, about the warmth and good feeling of it, but I wanted to put it down simply for my own joy, not for Mr. Fleagle. It was a moment I wanted to recapture and hold for myself. I wanted to relive the pleasure of an evening at New Street. To write it as I wanted, however, would violate all the rules of formal composition I'd learned in school, and Mr. Fleagle would surely give it a failing grade. Never mind. I would write something else for Mr. Fleagle after I had written this thing for myself.

When I finished it the night was half gone and there was no time left to compose a proper, respectable essay for Mr. Fleagle. There was no choice next morning but to turn in my private reminiscence of Belleville. Two days passed before Mr. Fleagle returned the graded papers, and he returned everyone's but mine. I was bracing myself for a command to report to Mr. Fleagle immediately after school for discipline when I saw him lift my paper from his desk and rap for the class's attention.

"Now, boys," he said, "I want to read you an essay. This is titled, 'The Art of Eating Spaghetti'."

And he started to read. My words! He was reading my words out loud to the entire class. What's more, the entire class was listening, listening attentively. Then somebody laughed, then the entire class was laughing, and not in contempt and ridicule, but with openhearted enjoyment. Even Mr. Fleagle stopped two or three times to repress a small prim smile.

I did my best to avoid showing pleasure, but what I was feeling was pure ecstasy at this startling demonstration that my words had the power to make people laugh. In the eleventh grade, at the eleventh hour as it were, I had discovered a calling. It was the happiest moment of my entire school career. When Mr. Fleagle finished he put the final seal on my happiness by saying, "Now that, boys, is an essay, don't you see. It's—don't you see—it's of the very essence of the essay, don't you see. Congratulations, Mr. Baker."

For the first time, light shone on a possibility. It wasn't a very heartening possibility, to be sure. Writing couldn't lead to a job after high school, and it was hardly honest work, but Mr. Fleagle had opened a door for me. After that I ranked Mr. Fleagle among the finest teachers in the school.

My mother was almost as delighted as I when I showed her Mr. Fleagle's A-Plus and described my triumph. Hadn't she always said I had a talent for writing? "Now if you work hard at it, Buddy, you can make something of yourself."

Readings in Autobiographical Incident

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Autobiographical Incident

In autobiographical incident, writers tell a story from their personal experiences. Besides narrating an incident, writers tell readers what it has meant to them. This seems simple enough: writers narrate a single remembered incident and say why it was (is still) important to them. The best writers remind us, however, that writing an autobiographical incident is far from simple.

The best writers orient readers to the incident, present the scene and other people who were present, and then tell a story that may include dialogue, movement or gestures, names of people or objects, and sensory details. Writers describe their feelings, understandings, or reflections at the time of the incident; they may also evaluate the incident from their present perspective, implying or stating its significance in their lives. The best writers use many strategies, selecting those appropriate to the writing situation. The challenge in writing autobiographical incidents is both to select appropriate strategies and to use them in a stylistically effective way.

While the *rhetorical* aspect of the assessment focuses on the distinctive features of writing types, the *effectiveness* aspect guides us to look carefully at the more comprehensive features of coherence and style. Coherence, a sense of organization, flow, and focus, is essential to all good writing. The coherent essay has a clear direction, each section flowing naturally from the preceding one. Coherence is demonstrated to readers through emphasis, organization, and repetition achieved through recurrences of language, syntax, and ideas. Style, for the purposes of this assessment, is observable in two written language features: (1) *sentence control* and (2) *word choice* or *diction*. In assessment of the effectiveness of style, the primary considerations are *appropriateness*, *precision*, and *control*.

Score Point 6 – Exceptional Achievement

Incident. The writer of a six-point essay tells a coherent and engaging story. The narrative moves irresistibly toward a compelling and satisfying realization for both the writer and the reader. The narrative tells readers what they need to know to understand what happened and provides details to help readers infer its effect on the writer. The writer of a six-point essay effectively uses a variety of the following strategies with sophistication and control:

- Naming (specific names of people or objects, quantities, numbers)
- Visual details of scene, objects, or people (size, colors, shapes, features, dress)
- Sounds or smells of the scene
- Specific narrative action (movements, gestures, expressions)
- Dialogue
- Interior monologue
- Pacing: accelerating the pace to accommodate time or mood changes or slowing the pace to elaborate the central moment in the incident
- Suspense, tension, or surprise
- Comparison or contrast to other scenes or people
- Expression of remembered feelings or insights at the time of the incident

Context. The writer locates the incident in a particular physical or psychological setting, orienting the reader to scene, people, and events and providing background or context for the incident. By using carefully chosen details relevant to the incident, the writer goes beyond simply identifying or pointing to the scene or people.

Some writers may devote considerable space in the essay to orienting readers but not at the expense of a well-told incident. Other writers may focus so compellingly on the details of the incident that the context is presented briefly rather than developed elaborately. Thus, a six-point essay finds a balance between static context and movement into the dramatic, narrated incident.

Significance. In a six-point essay we know the writer's attitude toward the incident. The

essay reveals why the incident was important to the writer. This significance can be either implied or stated. If it is implied, word choice and sensory detail allow the reader to infer it confidently. It may be stated in the writer's insights at the time of the incident or in reflections from the writer's present perspective. These insights and reflections are subtly integrated into the narration and may be further clarified as a conclusion to the essay.

Score Point 5 - Commendable Achievement

Incident. As in a six-point essay, the incident is coherent and engaging. The five-point essay may rely on a narrower range of narrative strategies, or it may use a variety of strategies less effectively. A five-point essay may be structurally more predictable than a six-point one, and it may be less focused than a six-point essay. Still, the writer of a five-point essay tells a clear, engaging story.

Context. The five-point essay contains appropriate and adequate context, as does a six-point essay. The context does not dominate the essay at the expense of the incident.

Significance. The attitude and impact of the situation can be either implied or stated but will be clear, either through remembered insights or present reflections. The insights may be less well integrated into the essay than in a six-point essay, more often appearing at the end. The insights may not be as perceptive or as probing as in a six-point paper, but still they will not be superficial.

Score Point 4 - Adequate Achievement

Incident. The essay is a well-told incident but may lack the coherence and command of a five-point essay. There may be digressions, but the story comes back on track quickly. There is also a limited use of strategies.

Context. The context is adequate to orient readers to the incident. The balance among incident, context, and significance may seem awkward.

Significance. Attitude and impact may be implied or stated. Insights may be predictable and/or may seem only tacked on to the incident.

Score Point 3 - Some Evidence of Achievement

Incident. The essay does relate an incident. However, a series of events may be presented as an incident. The overall story is competently told. There is also a very limited use of narrative strategies.

Context. The context is out of balance with the incident and significance. The essay may devote too much space to context—generalizing and philosophizing—while neglecting the narrative. Or it may begin abruptly without necessary orientation.

Significance. The attitude and impact are briefly stated or implied to some degree. We know why the incident was memorable, although insights may be predictable, superficial, or even illogical.

Score Point 2 - Limited Evidence of Achievement

Incident. The essay may relate an incident without context or significance, or it may mention that incident only briefly without focusing on details. If the incident is longer, it is not competently told. The details may be sketchy, rambling, fragmentary, or irrelevant.

Context. There is confusion among incident, context, and significance; one becomes the other. The context may be limited or even missing, or the essay may focus entirely on context at the expense of the incident.

Significance. The essay has little or no statement of attitude or impact. What insight there is seems superficial.

Score Point 1 - Minimal Evidence of Achievement

The writer of the one-point essay incompetently responds to the prompt and omits one of the characteristics. It may be confusing and garbled.

Incident. The essay may refer vaguely to an event without identifying it specifically, it may only imply an incident in the context, or it may not mention an incident at all. The essay may focus on others instead of the writer.

Context and Significance. Since there is little or no incident, the essay becomes all context or significance. The writer may ramble on about the subject of the prompt or may philosophize on lessons learned.

Unscorable – Inappropriate Response

Off topic. No response. Written in a foreign language.

Controversial Issue

A controversial issue essay is a position paper on a substantive matter about which people disagree. The issue may arise from a particular occasion, or it may be part of an ongoing debate. In addressing a controversial issue, writers examine an issue thoughtfully, establish a position on the issue, and develop a carefully reasoned, well-supported argument for their position. The primary goal of writers is to establish their own views on the issue and to challenge other views in an effort to win the readers' respect, convincing readers to take their viewpoint seriously and to recognize its validity, even if they do not agree with it. Writers in this situation strive to understand their readers' values and assumptions in order to establish common grounds for reasoned argument. They anticipate readers' likely objections or questions and refute their possible counterarguments.

Controversial issue involves strategies central to other types of writing. The writer of a controversial issue essay may define the issue by reporting information, may speculate about the effects of an unresolved issue (speculation about causes or effects), establish authority or credibility by using an autobiographical incident, or refute opposing points by evaluating them (evaluation).

Importance of Controversial Issue

Writing about controversial issues allows students to examine complex problems, to take positions after thoughtful deliberation, and then to defend those positions by constructing well-reasoned arguments. Arguing for their views and defending their positions against objections, writers learn to appeal to an audience both logically and emotionally. When distinguishing between fact and opinion, drawing conclusions, and evaluating evidence, writers are exercising critical thinking skills. Engaging in reasoned argument, writers discover their own basic values.

When students write about controversial issues, they learn how to debate social issues and come to understand and respect different view points. They see how individuals can be brought into contact with one another and can build bridges to areas of common ground.

Taking a stand on a controversial issue can be a dynamic and powerful language experience. Students who have skillfully and critically addressed controversial issues in writing will be more likely to reject prejudice and propaganda and to embrace logic and reason as they negotiate the maze of issues that face us as individuals and as a nation.

Characteristics of Controversial Issue

Central to controversial issue writing is the issue, that is, a matter in dispute about which

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reasonable people disagree. Writers take a definite position on that issue and argue persuasively, using solid evidence and sound, inventive reasoning to support their arguments. Tone is an important aspect of controversial issue essays, since arguments may appeal to logic, emotion, and ethics.

Issue

Writers of controversial issue essays orient their readers by clearly defining and focusing the issue itself. Introducing the controversy leads to a statement of the position or the stance taken. Writers acknowledge, perhaps only implicitly, that reasonable people disagree on the issue and that the disagreement is based on life experience, opinion, reasoning, and judgment. To orient and accommodate their readers, writers may use a variety of strategies: they may clearly define their terms, ask rhetorical questions to involve readers, or present information to establish their credibility as informed proponents. Alternative strategies include presenting the issue through personal anecdote, example, scenario, or a case study.

Position

Writers take an authoritative stand on the controversial issue. The stand is expressed in a thesis statement that may also provide a philosophical, logical, or emotional foundation for that position. A successful paper grounds its position in a central belief or vision; for example, that the hazards of nuclear power plants outweigh all potential benefits. In an essay concerning a controversial issue, a thesis statement is likely to appear early in the essay and to be restated in a number of ways throughout the essay. Writers may consider both sides of an issue, but the reader is never in doubt about the writer's position. Regardless of the extent of accommodation to readers' values and views, the writer must forcefully argue his or her own position.

Support

Because readers will not always agree with the written position on a controversial issue, writers need to gain their readers' confidence by establishing common values and common principles. They then argue convincingly with reasons and evidence. Valid counterarguments will be accommodated, invalid ones refuted. Writers may want to raise questions in their readers' minds and answer these questions persuasively.

Effective arguments build trust by establishing writers' credibility. Arguments may appeal to emotion by indicating concern and may appeal to logic through well-reasoned support. Within the reasoning may appear examples, details, expert opinion, quotations from literature, anecdotes, personal experiences, or hypothetical situations. Writers may draw on common facts accepted as true, generalizations, or universal truths. They may use analogies, syllogisms, comparison/contrast, cause-and-effect reasoning, or rhetorical questions. The argument may be deductive, giving specific support to generalizations, or inductive, drawing conclusions from evidence. Whatever strategies the writer adopts, the argument must be organized astutely. The most important evidence is given central consideration and the most weight in the essay. The writer's ultimate goal is to convince readers that the writer's position should be taken seriously.

Tone

Tone refers to the writer's attitude toward the subject. In a successful controversial issue essay, the tone reflects a committed, assured writer.

The tone is always reasonable and confident. It may emphasize conviction and commitment by appealing to emotion. It may take the tone of moral advocacy through examining ethical concerns in the issue. But always it enlists the reader's trust through its sincerity and thoughtful consideration of important evidence in arriving at a judgment.

Exemplary Student Essay

Comments in brackets indicate the strengths of this essay and, in particular, its special qualities as a controversial issue essay. The student's complete writing process is presented in the next section.

Parents Should Not Host Teenage Drinking Parties

by Joanne Waszczak

In light of widespread teenage drinking in our society today, many parents have resorted to throwing drinking parties in their homes for their high school aged children and their children's friends. The parents confiscate the keys of all until the teenage drivers can prove that they are sober.

[Notes the context or problem; defines the issue]

These parents say that they feel much more comfortable meeting the kids who are "partying," or drinking, with their teenagers. They say they would rather host parties in their own homes than allow their kids to attend weekend "keggers" (unsupervised drinking parties) at strangers' homes.

[First presents likely counterarguments]

On a larger scale, parents reason that they know kids will drink anyway and that they feel safer knowing they have control of the potentially fatal drinking and driving situation. These adults argue that they would rather break the law than see their kids die.

Morally speaking, the hosting parents believe that providing alcohol to minors shows that they accept today's teenage drinking situation and that they are willing to discuss it openly. Such parents believe that creating an open atmosphere for discussion in the family precedes maintaining the facade of a law-abiding citizen. They think that by relieving teens of the peer pressure to drive drunk or to ride with someone who drives drunk, their kids will feel more comfortable communicating their feelings to their parents.

[Presents all counterarguments fairly]

Yet, however utopian this idea seems, these parents choose to ignore the consequences of their actions. I do not see how they can justify hosting teenage drinking parties. In actuality, hosting a drinking party gives the parents too much responsibility. They face the danger of several sticky situations—a teenager who consumes too much alcohol requiring medical attention, a couple whose inhibitions are lessened by alcohol engaging in sexual activities, or an especially crafty kid who pretends he's sober securing the return of his keys.

[Her thesis—her position on the issue—her argument begins here. She refutes counterarguments as she develops her own argument.]

[Reason 1: dangerous consequences of hosting drinking parties]

The parents who agree to host such parties are also blatantly breaking the law. Contributing to the delinquency of a minor is grounds for arrest and is a violation which is placed permanently on one's record.

[Reason 2: illegal to host teenage drinking parties]

Additionally, these parents who are struggling to create an honest atmosphere in their homes fail to realize that they are sending a message to their kids: "It's okay to break the law." Then, if someday their teenager shoplifts, steals a car, pushes drugs, or simply comes home late, what grounds have these parents to criticize and to punish their child? He or she has only broken a law of the state or of the household, but a law nonetheless. The teenager won't have to think much to realize that a double standard exists, that his or her parents are hypocritical. For if a parent transcends the law, a child should certainly be afforded the same privilege.

[Reason 3: condones law-breaking; scenario as evidence]

These parties contain yet another underlying message for teens: "It's okay to drink for the sake of drinking." Parents pass on their habits to their children, implying that it's acceptable to drown stress and anxiety in alcohol. Instead of introducing safer solutions to deal with problems and other avenues to have fun with friends, these parents encourage kids to turn to drinking in times of need.

[Reason 4: encourages improper use of alcohol]

It's one thing to accept teenage drinking; it's another to condone it. One could compare it to the parent who tells his or her teenager about birth control versus the parent who provides it for him or her.

[Analogy]

The parent who strives for an open atmosphere in the home is to be honored. But the parent who resorts to throwing drinking parties is approaching the goal in the wrong manner. Better means exist to deal with a child who drinks at parties. For example, the "Contract for Life" agreement, sponsored by several anti-drunk-driving groups, provides that the parent who signs the document will pick up the teenager who signs the document at anytime, anywhere, no questions asked until the next morning. "Safe Rides" programs operate under the same concept and are available to teens in many areas on Friday and Saturday nights. The transportation is free and confidential; it requires only a phone call.

[Contrasts two kinds of parents; presents alternatives to parent-sponsored teenage drinking parties]

Both of the services mentioned above aim toward the same goal as that of the party-giving parent. While these programs admit that teens drink, they do not actively encourage them to do so. And in the process, the "Contract for Life" agreement opens communication lines between parent and child.

Parents who host drinking parties must stop to realize that if they believe their kids are responsible enough to drink, then the kids must be responsible enough to take charge of their own transportation. Adults cannot continue to allow their teenagers to shirk the responsibility that alcohol brings. Giving up hosting drinking parties is a first step.

[Restates thesis]

One Student's Writing Process

This section presents Joanne Waszczak's complete writing process from prewriting through revision. (See her revised essay in the previous section.) The process illustrates many of the important teaching issues that are unique to controversial issue essays. It also illustrates one possible framework of support for students as they go about planning, drafting, and revising an essay that poses special challenges to be assertive and convincing while at the same time accommodating readers' objections and counterarguments. At least on their first attempts to write controversial issue essays seriously, all students can benefit from a supportive writing-process approach. What they gain is a much better chance of producing a fully realized essay.

Waszczak's teacher began by discussing with the class three controversial issue essays—two outstanding students' essays and one published essay. Together, teacher and students identified the obvious main features or characteristics of this type of writing. They also discussed writers' likely sources of information for the evidence in their arguments, and they conjectured about problems writers had to solve in writing this type of essay.

Prewriting

Following prewriting directions from her teacher, Waszczak began by listing issues she cared about. Here is her list:

Should parents provide alcohol to minors at home?
Should student athletes be subjected to mandatory drug testing?
Should creationism be taught in school to balance evolutionism?
Should birth control clinics be allowed to set up offices in schools?
Should minors be allowed to have an abortion without parental consent?
Should college admission be based solely on academic achievement?
Should schools be allowed to impose codes of conduct?
Should principals be allowed to censor student conduct?
Should police be able to pose as undercover agents in high schools?
Should AIDS patients be allowed to attend public schools? work with the public? be required to tell their employers?
Should undocumented workers have full rights of American citizens?
Should neo-Nazism be tolerable under the First Amendment as freedom of expression?
Should Satanists be allowed to legalize slaughter of animals for religious purposes/worship? (under freedom of religion)
Should advertisers be allowed to use subliminal messages?
Should profane music be censored?
Should the military be allowed to dismiss men for unorthodox sexual preferences?

Waszczak then joined her small-group writing workshop to discuss lists of issues. Workshop members considered whether an issue was really an issue (that is, an issue on which reasonable people disagree). Some students added issues to their lists. They made tentative choices of issues to write about and discussed their positions on the issues. Finally, they advised each other on focusing and defining each issue so that it could be argued effectively.

Waszczak then wrote down her issue and completed a brief quickwrite defining the issue.

Issue: Should parents provide alcohol to minors at home?

In light of widespread teenage drinking, many parents have resorted to throwing in-home alcohol parties for their children and their children's friends. The parents take the car keys of all kids attending the party and refuse to surrender the keys until the driver can prove he/she is sober.

Is this practice, although illegal, practical? Parents reason that they know kids will drink anyway and that they feel safer knowing they have control of the drinking and driving situation. These adults argue that they'd rather break the law than see their kids dead.

Continuing her teacher's prewriting activity sequence for controversial issue essays, Waszczak set up a pro and con table for her issue. In the pro column she jotted down reasons why parents should sponsor teenage drinking parties. In the con column she jotted down reasons why they should not. This activity enabled her to discover whether she knew enough about the issue to write an extended essay about it.

With some confidence that she understood the issue, Waszczak identified her readers and tried a first draft of her essay's thesis.

Readers: The general public, including adults, minors, parents, teachers, law enforcers.

PRO	*CON*
less chance of drunk driving accidents for their kids and their kids' friends	*against the law*
more control over the use of alcohol	*gives kids the idea that parent condones minors' use of alcohol*
convinces kids to think parent is "cool" for understanding the realities of teenage drinking	*makes parent less of an authority figure in kids' eyes because they're breaking the law*
parents know who their kids are "partying" with	*other parents may disapprove of the situation and lose respect for the hosting parent*
other parents may be grateful to the hosting parent for being so accepting and considerate of their kids' welfare	*the hosting parent may not be able to make certain that kids are really sober*
relaxed, open parents who accept kids' drinking	*if kids spend the night, it puts hosting parent in an awkward situation in regard to sex*
teens themselves	*law-abiding citizens*
maybe SADD, MADD?	*conservative parents*
	maybe SADD, MADD?

Thesis: Acknowledging teenage drinking is separate from encouraging it. Parents who throw drinking parties may think they are saving lives, but they're actually losing the respect of minors by breaking the law and setting a bad example.

Testing her writing topic further, Waszczak listed possible reasons in support of her position. She wanted to discover whether she really had a strong argument that would be convincing to her readers. After reflecting on the list, she put asterisks by her most promising reasons.

My reasons:

- *providing alcohol to minors is illegal; breaking the law**
- *sets a bad example; if a parent can break the law, why can't his/her kid?**
- *better means to deal with teenage drinking; sign a "Contract for Life" with kid stating parent will pick up kid anywhere, anytime, no questions asked—still admits kids drink without encouraging them to do so**
- *also Safe Rides programs; ride anytime, anywhere, no questions asked*
- *gives hosting parent too much responsibility; not only alcohol consumption level (too much requires medical attention) but sexual activity (much more likely when alcohol lessens inhibitions)**
- *if a kid is responsible enough to handle drinking in his/her parents' eyes, he/she should also be responsible enough to take charge of his/her own transportation**

Waszczak then took her statement of readers and thesis and her list of possible reasons to a brief two-minute conference with her teacher, who wanted to know whether her thesis seemed assertive and workable and whether she had the beginnings of a convincing argument. Waszczak's teacher uses these conferences to decide whether students should choose a different topic or go ahead with the one they have been exploring. He encouraged Waszczak to go ahead.

In a final prewriting activity, Waszczak listed all the likely counterarguments the readers would have in mind as they read her essay. She then met again with her writing workshop group to share her topic, thesis, reasons, and likely counterarguments. The group's task was to extend members' lists of possibly convincing reasons and likely counterarguments and to advise on whether to accommodate or refute counterarguments. Waszczak decided tentatively to refute the two counterarguments in her list:

Counterarguments:

providing alcohol to minors at in-home drinking parties

- *lets parent control drinking/driving*
- *lets parent know who is "partying" with his/her kid*
- *providing alcohol to minors*
- *accepts the fact that they drink*
- *creates an open atmosphere so parent/kid can be honest, no pressure*

Waszczak reviewed all of her prewriting material and then planned and completed a first draft.

Waszczak's first draft is presented here.

In light of widespread teenage drinking in our society today, many parents have resorted to throwing drinking parties in their homes for their high school aged children and their children's friends. The par-

ents confiscate the keys of all kids attending the bash and refuse to return the keys until the teenage driver can prove that he or she is sober.

Parents reason that they know kids will drink anyway and that they feel safer knowing they have control of the potentially fatal drinking and driving situation. These adults argue that they would rather break the law than see their kids die.

These parents say that they feel much more comfortable knowing the kids who are "partying," or drinking, with their teenagers. They would rather host parties in their own homes than allow their kids to attend weekend "keggers" at strangers' homes.

Morally speaking, the hosting parents believe that providing alcohol to minors shows that they accept today's teenage drinking situation and that they are willing to discuss it openly. Such parents believe that creating an open atmosphere for discussion in the family precedes maintaining the facade of a law-abiding citizen. They think that by relieving teens of the peer pressure to drive drunk or to ride with someone who drives drunk, their kids will feel more comfortable communicating their feelings to their parents.

Yet however utopian this idea seems, these parents choose to ignore the consequences of their actions. Practically, hosting a drinking party gives the parents too much responsibility. They face the danger of subjecting themselves to several sticky situations—a teenager who consumes too much alcohol requiring medical attention, a couple whose inhibitions are lessened by alcohol engaging in sexual activities, or an especially crafty kid who pretends he's sober when he's really drunk.

The parents who agree to host such parties are also blatantly breaking the law. Contributing to the delinquency of a minor is grounds for arrest and is a violation which is placed permanently on one's record.

Additionally, these parents (who are trying so hard to be "cool"), who are struggling to create an honest atmosphere in their homes, fail to realize that they are sending a message to their kids: "It's okay to break the law." Then, when their teenager shoplifts, steals a car, or pushes drugs, what grounds have these parents to criticize and to punish their arrested child? Their teenager won't have to think much to realize that a double standard exists, that their parents are hypocritical.

These parties contain yet another underlying message for teens: "It's OK to drink for the sake of drinking." Parents pass on their habits to their children, implying that it's acceptable to drown stress and anxiety in alcohol. Instead of introducing safer solutions to dealing with problems, and other avenues to have fun with friends, these parents encourage kids to turn to drinking in times of need.

It's one thing to accept teenage drinking; it's another to condone it. (One could compare it to the parent who tells his or her teenager about birth control versus the parent who provides it for him or her.)

The parent who strives for an open atmosphere in the home is to be honored. But the parent who resorts to throwing drinking parties in his own home is approaching his goal in the wrong manner. Better means exist to deal with a child's drinking. The "Contract for Life" agreement, sponsored by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, provides that the parent who signs the document will pick up the teenager who signs the document at anytime, anywhere, no questions asked until the next morning. Safe Rides programs operate under the same idea and are available to teens in many areas on Friday and Saturday nights. The transportation is free and confidential; it requires only a phone call.

Both of the solutions mentioned above aim toward the same goal as that of the struggling parent. While these programs admit that teens drink, they do not actively encourage them to do so. And in the process, these programs open communication lines between parent and child.

Parents who host drinking parties must stop to realize that if they believe their kids are responsible enough to drink, then they must be responsible enough to take charge of their own transportation. Adults cannot continue to allow their teenagers to shirk the responsibility that alcohol brings.

Waszczak exchanged drafts with another student in her writing workshop group. To prepare for a group discussion of its members' first drafts, her teacher asked all students to write out as homework their initial responses to their partner's drafts. The teacher's guidelines are presented here with Waszczak's partner's responses indented under each guideline:

As you read your partner's draft, keep this central question in mind: how can this argument be made more convincing for its readers?

1. Is the issue well defined? Is it truly controversial, that is, can it be reasonably argued for or against? Does it interest you?

   The issue is well defined. It is truly controversial. Yes, it interests me because it is a relevant problem in today's society.

2. Is the writer's position on the issue clearly stated? Where does the statement of position occur?

   The position is clearly stated. It occurs at the bottom of the third page. I think it's good that you waited to state your position until you showed the other side.

3. Consider the writer's reasons for supporting this position. Which are most convincing? Which are least convincing? Which reasons need more development?

Should the order of the reasons be changed?

Most convincing reasons:

a. parents are sending the wrong messages to their kids (it's OK to drink; OK to break the law)
b. too much responsibility on parents
c. against the law

Least convincing reasons/need more development:
acceptance vs. condoning (what's the difference as it applies to drinking?)
I think the reasons are in a good order and shouldn't be changed.

4. Study the evidence given in support of the reasons. Is the evidence believable? Is it relevant to the issue? Where is more evidence needed?

The evidence is believable and relevant. More evidence is needed about the idea that allowing your children to drink in your home can lead to shoplifting, stealing, etc.

5. Does the writer consider possible counterarguments? How convincing is the writer's handling of counterarguments?

The whole beginning of the essay gives counterarguments, and it's very convincing. The reason why parents allow their kids to have parties with alcohol at their home is clearly addressed and handled well. Shouldn't the third paragraph come before the second one?

6. Does the writer consider the intended audience? As a reader, you are one member of that audience. What is your response to the tone of the essay?

I feel the tone is a good one for this sort of essay. It addresses the general public, yet also specifically talks to parents of teenagers.

7. Pay particular attention to the way the writer starts and concludes the essay. If you sense a problem here, can you suggest a more effective alternative to the writer's approach?

The beginning and conclusion of the essay are done very well. The end ties it up with saying what adults are ultimately doing by allowing this to happen. I think it could be even stronger if you state your position again.

In class Waszczak and her partner met to discuss each other's drafts, using their written responses as a starting point. When time permits, Waszczak's teacher reports, he asks workshop groups to read aloud and discuss their drafts; and he quickly checks each draft to ensure that it argues a position on a controversial issue and to make global (or rhetorical) suggestions for revision.

Waszczak then revised her essay. Because, following thoughtful prewriting, her first draft was so successful, she made only a few changes: reordering paragraphs 2 and 3, adding a new paragraph 4, asserting her thesis more explicitly in paragraph 5, and in the final paragraph, adding a sentence to strengthen an argument in paragraph 7 and revising a few sentences.

Framework for Writing About Controversial Issues

A suggested sequence of activities for controversial issue assignments (easily adaptable to collaborative activities):

Step 1. List issues and pose them as questions. (Example: Should parents avoid divorce at all costs for the sake of their children?)

Step 2. From your list, choose an issue on which reasonable people disagree, that you care about, that is current, and that can easily be researched.

Step 3. Give your opinion on the issue in a few sentences.

Step 4. Describe your readers or audience.

Step 5. List your reasons for believing as you do. Tell briefly why each is a good reason for your particular audience.

Step 6. List counterarguments. Write down some ways you can answer or defend your own reasons against the counterarguments.

Step 7. Do a quickwrite about the kind of evidence you need to support your reasons. Also, think of the kinds of evidence that would help your readers accept your reasons. Do you know authorities on the issue? Have your had a personal experience with it?

Step 8. Gather additional information and evidence that will help you argue your position.

Step 9. Write a brief outline for your essay. Plan to include a clear definition of the issue, a stand that is clearly stated in a thesis, and sound reasoning with solid evidence that argues your position and acknowledges and refutes counterarguments.

Step 10. Write your rough draft. Try to have your opening engage your readers' attention. When arguing points, appeal to your readers' sense of reason. Techniques to develop support might include examples and details, personal experiences, quotations, expert opinion, comparisons/contrasts, rhetorical questions, and inductive/deductive reasoning. Avoid making sweeping generalizations or oversimplifying the issue. End strongly. Have your tone create a favorable impression so that readers will take the position seriously.

Step 11. Evaluate your draft by answering these questions:

- Have I considered my reader's beliefs and opinions in this essay?
- Do I have strong reasons to support my opinion and evidence to back up my reasons?
- Have I thought about counterarguments and answered those arguments?

List things that you might want to add and change in your draft. What *specific* problems in the draft are you having difficulty solving?

Step 12. Have your draft evaluated by at least two other students. (Here students might use the response guides from the previous section.)

Step 13. Reread your own and the other students' evaluations. Revise your paper by paying attention to your evaluator's suggestions and by trying to do the following:

- Try to accommodate your reader by finding common ground, perhaps emphasizing areas of agreement.
- Include personal experience, examples, and anecdotes that put the issue in human terms.
- Make your argument seem more understandable and reasonable by fully explaining reasons and developing points through several strategies and a wide range of evidence.
- Make sure that your argument follows logically.
- Alert your readers through the use of transitions.
- Look for abstract or unclear writing; use familiar words instead of unusual ones; rewrite convoluted sentences.
- Reconsider both the beginning and the ending.
- Edit carefully to correct errors of mechanics, spelling, usage, punctuation, or style. Read for specific errors that you commonly make. After you have produced a final copy, be sure to proofread it before handing it in.

Discussion and Debate

Controversial issue by definition involves or presupposes a give-and-take of opinions, a weighing of evidence. Discussing, debating—even arguing—are integral to the process of teaching controversial issue. Examining evidence and reasoning are important in assessing a peer's progress in developing an argument.

Responding orally to the complexities of a controversial issue will help students develop a more complete, committed, and conscientious position to defend (or argue) in an essay.

Tolerance and acceptance of others' opinions and their right to express them must be the foundation upon which any fair and reasonable treatment of a controversial issue can take place in the classroom. Controversial issue topics can be discussed, debated, and analyzed in many content areas.

Some of the ways students can grapple orally with the issues include the following:

Role-Playing. Students adopt particular personas and play out the roles in a scene or conflict. Both participants and spectators will hear voice and tone and will see concrete ways to orient readers to the issue. For example, a "student editor" and her parent could meet with the "principal" and a "school board member" to discuss the principal's censoring of an article on teen pregnancy.

Debates. When students can make arguments, counterarguments, and rebuttals, they explore a wide range of ways to support a position and address other points of view, while generating the emotional energy as a debater that translates into commitment and credibility as a writer.

Panel Discussions. Having students adopt personas as "specialists" on the issue and field questions prepared by the audience (remaining students) offers lively opportunity to practice research skills and speaking skills while encouraging students to explore and test positions, arguments, and tone.

Charting an Argument

Students first work individually to discover or clarify their own positions. Then they work in collaborative groups that contain advocates of both pro and con positions to chart arguments and counterarguments. As a final prewriting strategy, they meet with others of the same position to develop answers to the counterarguments. See Figure 1.

Classroom Writing Assignments

These writing assignments were gathered from California classroom teachers. Some may be useful to you in just the form we present them; others you will want to adapt for your own situation and students. The writing assignments assume a full writing-process sequence of activities: discussion or research, prewriting, drafting, revising, with peer response and help from you as appropriate. We have selected assignments that illustrate a wide range of possibilities for controversial issue writing.

Some assignments engage students in familiar local issues. Others require research: this type of writing invites extended research projects. In fact, students cannot write seriously about most state, national, and international issues without researching the issue.

We offer assignments in several school subjects, beginning with generic activities and assignments useful in any subject and then listing specific assignments for English, history–social science, and science.

The first items focus on strategies for engaging students with issues and developing their ideas and arguments.

The following generic assignment for controversial issue essays can be particularized in countless ways in any subject area. It is a good assignment in itself in that it lets students choose their own topics:

> Write an essay in which you take a position on a controversial issue. Consider current school or community issues on which reasonable people disagree. Examine the issue critically, take a position on it, and develop a reasoned argument in support of your position. Assume that your readers hold positions that are different from your own.

The remaining subject-specific assignments illustrate many of the ways to particularize this generic assignment.

Reasons	Counterarguments	Answers to Counterarguments
Reason 1: Women still earn only $.59 for every $1.00 earned by men.	But, if the ERA is passed, women will take jobs that men—the breadwinners—should rightfully have.	*That's not so because many thousands of women are heads of households themselves.*
Reason 2: Women are still discriminated against in the job market, in education, and so forth.	That's because women are not as capable as men—they need looking after while men do the real work.	*(Better go to the library for this one: find examples of successful modern women who are making great contributions.)*
Reason 3: Equality strengthens society.	The ERA will mean the breakdown of the family, which will weaken society.	*Mature relationships are based on mutual respect between equals. Such relationships can rescue the already weakening family unit and benefit society as a whole.*

Fig. 1. Charting an argument

Language Arts

- Write an essay about an issue raised in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. State your position on one of the racial policies examined in the novel. Support your position with reasons and with anecdotes, examples, or evidence from the novel. You may include other supporting information from your own knowledge if you wish. Because your readers may not agree with you, anticipate their arguments, and present the strongest reasons supporting your position. Present your argument so that you will convince your readers to seriously consider your position.
- Even today, *Huckleberry Finn* ranks tenth on a list of books most banned from school libraries. Some people object to the character's lying, the petty theft, and the parodies of religion and to the middle-class "respectability," the bad language, and the bad grammar. Write an essay supporting or refuting the idea that *Huck Finn* should be banned from your school library for the above reason.
- *The Crucible*. The issues raised by Senator Joseph McCarthy in 1953 caused much controversy at the time and probably even more controversy today. After doing some background research on Senator McCarthy's allegations, write an essay either agreeing with McCarthy or refuting his claims. Your goal is to convince your reader of the value of the side you've chosen to support.
- *Hamlet*. Was Hamlet mad or not?
- In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Jem, Scout, and Dill watch the trial of a black man accused of raping a white woman. Many characters in the book felt that this trial was too "strong" for young children to watch. Atticus said, "We've made it this way for them, they might as well learn to cope with it." Write an essay taking a position on the issue of exposing children to strong ideas.
- *The Glass Menagerie*. Many readers might condemn Tom for leaving his family. Do you think it is wrong for Tom to look after himself even if he has to hurt others? Write an essay opposing or supporting Tom's leaving. State your opinion and develop arguments to support it.
- People often remark, "Life just isn't fair." In the *Great Gatsby* Nick said: "A sense of the fundamental decencies is parceled out unequally at birth." Write your opinion of this statement. Use arguments to defend your position. Use evidence from the novel and your own experience. Try to persuade readers who might disagree with your opinion to agree with you.
- The play *An Enemy of the People* presents several conflicts and issues, such as freedom of the press, minority rights, political loyalty, and social responsibility. These issues frequently emerge today. Choose a current issue that can be related to a theme in *An Enemy of the People*. This issue should be controversial in nature, one with reasons, examples, evidence, and other supporting information, including quotations from the play. Consider the opposing viewpoint and argue against it. Convince your readers to see your side.
- The book *1984* depicts a totalitarian government that controls its population partly by entering its peoples' lives. The government manipulates language, employs thought police, and uses the ever-present telescreen to patrol people's actions.

  Today it is common to be screened by cameras in banks and department stores. Businesses have easy access to our bank-account figures. In fact, some people would argue that our personal lives are being invaded as those depicted in *1984*.

  Choose one practice in our present society that could be construed as an invasion of privacy. Argue either in favor of or against continuation of that practice. Give reasons for your opinion and anticipate arguments in favor of the other side.

History–Social Science

- All federal judges are appointed for "life or good behavior." Many people believe that judges, like other government officials, should be held up to public scrutiny periodically. Those who oppose this point out that if judges are subjected to that kind of review, there would be a good chance that

many of their decisions would be politically motivated.

Take a position for or against the idea that all federal judges should periodically be forced to stand for "reconfirmation."

- The Constitution of the United States states that those people who commit or are accused of committing a crime will not receive "cruel or unusual punishment." Those who are in favor of the death penalty claim that it is the "punishment that fits the crime." Those who disagree with the death penalty see it as murder committed by the government and believe that it has virtually no deterrent effect. Defend or attack the death penalty.
- Should a father in a divorce-custody case receive the same consideration as the mother in deciding who should get custody of a child?
- You are a justice on the Supreme Court of the United States. You are faced with making a decision on whether or not prayer in public schools should be permitted. Make your decision and justify it.
- In 1846 problems between Mexico and the United States flared up, and the two countries went to war. As a result of the war, the United States acquired one-half of Mexico. Was the war a justifiable war, or was it a land-grabbing expedition on the part of the United States?
- As one views the results of World War I, one wonders if the United States' sacrifices were in vain. In view of the results after World War I, was the United States justified in entering the war?
- In terms of what was known in 1945, was the United States justified in dropping the atomic bombs?
- The following assignments come from or are based on released prompts from the *Advanced Placement Examination in American History:*

  a. Throughout our history, the Supreme Court has acted as a partisan political body rather than as a neutral arbiter of constitutional principles.
  b. United States foreign policy between 1815 and 1990 was determined less by strategic, moral, or political interests than by economic interests.
  c. Despite the view of some historians that the conflict between Great Britain and its 13 North American colonies was economic in origin, in fact the American Revolution had its roots in politics and other areas of American life.
  d. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the American cultural and intellectual community contributed to the development of a distinctive American national consciousness.
  e. "Both the Mexican War and the Spanish-American War were premeditated affairs resulting from deliberately calculated schemes of robbery on the part of a superior power against weak and defenseless neighbors."
  f. Andrew Carnegie has been viewed by some historians as the "prime representative of the industrial age" and by others as "an industrial leader atypical of the period."
  g. "Reform movements of the twentieth century have shown continuity in their goals and strategies." Assess the validity of this statement for ONE of the following pairs of reform movements:

     1. Progressivism and the New Deal
     2. Woman's Suffrage and post-Second World War feminism
     3. The New Deal and the Great Society

Science

- Use of nuclear weapons
- Use of nuclear energy
- Environment vs. heredity
- Strip mining
- Evolution vs. creationism
- Disappearance of the rain forest and its effect on the environment
- Toxic clouds – Love Canal
- Garbage crisis – incinerators – recycling
- Genetic engineering
- "Planned burn" (the issue in fire)

Response and Revision

Once the writing process has started, a writer can benefit from a reader's input. Response from others, especially peers, is necessary for student

writers to develop a sense of audience, a sense that their writing reaches more people than just their teacher. When others look at their work, students gain a sense of purpose. They realize that they write to communicate, not merely to earn a grade. Peer responders discern other students' writing processes and learn from the successes and failures of their classmates. Students in workshop or response groups must read for meaning, thinking about what is good in the writing and what might be improved. They then communicate this information to the writer.

Students can respond to each other's writing in pairs or in small groups. Effective, constructive response requires both coaching and practice. Modeling the process with the whole class provides a good introduction: the teacher talks about a draft, familiarizing students with relevant terms and rhetorical concepts, introducing stylistic considerations, and showing how to ask challenging but friendly questions. Continued modeling by the teacher within each small group can introduce new response approaches and help students reach higher and more effective levels of this response process.

Here we offer four different versions of revision guides. The first three ask specific questions about the draft and direct the student's attention to characteristics of controversial issue essays. The last guide assumes that the responders are familiar with this kind of writing and can analyze without the prompting of teacher-generated questions.

Response Guide 1

1. In your own words, summarize this writer's position on the issue.
2. Reread the introduction, and tell what it does to get the reader immediately involved.
3. What additional information would you like to know about the issue?
4. In your own words list the main arguments that the author has used to support his or her stand on the issue.
   Which argument do you think is most convincing?
   Which argument should be the central argument and thus given most development?
   What argument has the writer overlooked?
5. List any arguments that seem to be confusing, illogical, or inadequately argued.
6. Does the writer use any examples that show that he or she shares similar experiences with the reader?
   If not, what suggestions can you make?
7. Has the writer included and answered the most important counterarguments?
   Suggest other things that he or she could say about them.
8. Reread the conclusion. Tell the writer whether the draft ends interestingly and thoughtfully.
9. Tell the writer how he or she might make any changes in the draft's organization.
10. Underline words or phrases that you liked very much.
    Put a wavy line under words or phrases that you would like the writer to change.
    Put brackets around phrases or sentences that you do not understand.
11. Even though you may have agreed with much of this paper, play devil's advocate and write a strong paragraph that gives arguments for the other side.

Response Guide 2

1. Is there a clear statement of the issue and the stand that the writer takes?
   Identify this statement or show how it can be clarified.
2. Of the arguments presented, which is strongest? Which is most fully developed?
3. What arguments can you think of that the writer has overlooked?
   Give suggestions for supporting that argument.
4. Does the language seem clear for the reader? Point out any places where the language was not clear to you.
5. Does the writer show that he or she has something in common with the reader? If so, quote an example.
6. On the basis of the essay, what impression of the writer do you get? Is he or she reasonable? Informed? Concerned about the welfare of people? Clear thinking? Describe your impression of the writer.

Response Guide 3

Issue

1. What is the issue?

2. What is the writer's thesis?
3. What else could the writer have said to explain the issue in more detail?

Position

4. What is the writer's stance?

Support

5. What arguments are given to support the stance?
6. Which argument is central and should have the most development?
7. Which arguments appeal to logic?
8. Which appeal to emotions?
9. Which establish the writer's credibility or believability?
10. List support you can think of that the writer neglected.
11. What counterarguments are mentioned?
12. What counterarguments should the writer have considered?

Tone

13. What words help you see the writer's attitude?
14. How does the writer establish credibility or trust?
15. What else could the writer have done to establish a reasonable tone?

Response Guide 4

Analyze the paper in terms of these characteristics of controversial issue:

Issue
Position
Support
  Central argument
  Logical arguments
  Ethical (moral) emotional arguments
  Counterarguments
Tone

Additional Exemplary Student Essays

These additional student essays suggest still further possibilities for writing controversial issue essays. The essays represent the best efforts of very capable high school writers. Each essay benefitted from full composing-process development: research, discussion, or prewriting activities; peer and teacher response to a draft; and one or more revisions with guidelines.

The first essay takes a position on the age-old issue of civil disobedience, breaking man's law for the good of a higher law. It is not flawless, but it does argue convincingly for its position—that one should break laws if a higher truth justifies it. The writer is exceptionally well informed about the history of this controversial issue and is able to refer to and even to quote key sources. The essay illustrates how controversial issue assignments might become extended research projects and how they can arise out of literary study.

Which Will You Obey?

by Maria Bain

Is it ever justifiable to break a law? In the play Antigone, *the heroine defies Creon's decree and buries her condemned brother despite the capital punishment that would follow. She justified her actions by saying that a higher law existed which superseded man's laws, a higher law which she was obligated to obey. Though some of her fellow citizens disagreed with her, Antigone disobeyed Creon in order to obey the higher law. From the Golden Age of Athens to the present day, man has striven to answer the universal question: Is it ever justifiable to break a law, and if so, when?*

Laws exist to provide order, freedom, and protection for the innocent, because people, being imperfect, are capable of hurting each other. Most people agree that bad laws exist, but who decides which laws these are and if they should be disobeyed? If everyone broke laws freely due to "personal conviction," chaos would result. How is it possible, then, to decide whether it is justifiable to break a law? I believe the justification can be found in the idea of "higher law." Certain truths or laws exist which are above man's laws and which ensure justice, freedom, truth, and love. These laws have existed since creation, and time has proven them to be true. They transcend cultural differences and are found in the hearts of men and women all over the world. Those who abide by these laws demonstrate qualities such as unselfish love for others and a willingness to sacrifice personal well-being for the benefit of mankind. Those who have willingly obeyed these higher laws—though it has meant suffering because of their disobedience to man-made laws—have been responsible for preserving goodness and dignity in the world. Therefore, if a man-made law violates a higher law, it is not only justifiable, I believe it is necessary to break the man-made law in order to obey the higher one.

To understand higher law is to understand that it is a truth that exists in the heart, that it is applied every day. Hundreds of ordinary people illegally housed

Jews during Hitler's reign of terror, and many lost their lives because of it. People do such things because truth dwells in their hearts. World War II altruists recognized the shocking injustice of the Holocaust and felt sympathy and love for their fellow men and women. Each one knew how important it was to save the life of even one innocent Jew, and harboring one in his or her home, regardless of the risk, was a practical way of applying that knowledge. A verse in the Bible describes such an attitude: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13).

One of America's founding principles was that corrupt laws may exist, laws which violate the higher truths which were instilled in the heart of man at creation. The Declaration of Independence lists some of these truths as the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The early colonists fought a war in order to establish a nation which would stand upon these rights and ensure their survival. It was fundamental to the establishment of our nation that the citizens take part in shaping the laws and that they be free to disagree with them.

America's democracy allows laws to be changed by a slow, careful process. But, what should be done when a law violates higher truth? Some people argue that the citizens are obligated to obey all laws because they were established for the people's benefit and that if a law is considered unjust, it should be changed within the system. However, this argument shows a higher regard for the laws than for what the laws were intended to uphold—justice. Even American laws may be corrupt and demand disobedience.

Martin Luther King willingly broke American laws, not because he hated his country but because he loved it and wanted it to fulfill its creed. Although the Declaration of Independence described all men as being created equal, King felt that American Blacks had been denied equality; therefore, he dedicated his life to the abolition of segregation. King suffered disapproval and abuse, went to jail many times, and was eventually assassinated; but his devotion was not in vain because, as he said, "right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant." His voice had been heard, and even though he died, the movement did not. He was willing to suffer the consequences of breaking laws which he considered unjust, and because of his sacrifices, Black Americans became legally entitled to the same freedoms that white Americans enjoyed.

Americans, today, are faced with serious questions involving higher truths and unjust laws. Abortion has been and still is hotly debated. It is ironic and tragic, to me, that our nation, which views the Holocaust with horror and disgust, feels no prick of conscience at a similar death for over 21 million members of its own unborn generation. Some say that unborn babies are not yet alive, but that does not make sense to me. An unborn baby is certainly not dead, so it must be alive. As to the argument over when the baby becomes viable, that for me is not the issue. The question is when the baby gains value. I believe that each baby has a soul and a destiny from the moment of conception; his or her life has begun. Abortion is an act of human arrogance and selfishness: that a woman would deem her own happiness or even her life as more valuable than her baby's. It is a direct violation of higher truth.

When I first heard that some participants in Operation Rescue were blocking doorways to abortion clinics and were being arrested and jailed, I was not sure if I agreed with their methods. I have decided, however, that I do support them because it is the same question that faced altruists during the Holocaust. Aiding a Jew was illegal, but killing innocent people was a violation of higher laws; it was simply a matter of which law to obey. There are laws which prohibit blocking doorways, but there are higher laws which forbid murder. If I saw a woman walking towards a building, cradling her baby in her arms, knowing that it would be killed inside, I would try to rescue the child; I would do everything I could to save its life. In reality, women are carrying babies into buildings to be killed, and blocking a doorway is a small violation in comparison to the grotesque injustice of abortion. We simply have to choose which law to obey. In all cases where there is injustice, we make a choice one way or the other.

Laws were established to keep order because we are all imperfect, and, as Antigone knew, imperfect men create corrupt laws. Therefore, she didn't recoil at the thought of execution because she knew that higher laws exist which demand obedience if truth, justice, freedom, and love are to remain in the world. The question is not, as Martin Luther King put it, "whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. There are those who actively strive for the establishment of good, and there are those who quietly approve of the present by saying nothing...."

It is far more than a noble option to obey the higher laws; we are compelled to do so if we ever hope for mankind to live together in harmony and dignity.

This next essay argues the issue of abortion, taking the position that abortions should remain legal so that women may decide whether to have abortions. The writer acknowledges opposing positions.

Abortion: A Woman's Right

by Kym Bailey

Women should have the right to control their own reproductive lives. They should not be forced to suffer the consequences of social stigma, psychological and physical maiming, or death because of the unavailability of abortion.

A woman should have control over the decisions regarding her own body. This right is guaranteed in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States through religious freedom and freedom of thought. Many people, however, argue that if women should have such right, so ought the unborn child. But, at what point does an embryo or fetus become a "child"? Plato contends, "A fetus becomes a person at birth, after it is drawn or expelled from the womb, its umbilical cord is cut, and its lungs start to work." It would be rational to assume that if a fetus were incapable of viability outside the womb, it could hardly be considered a person. Since there is no moral consensus as to the point at which a fetus becomes a person, then no one, except the mother, has the right to condemn or disallow abortion.

With the increased availability of legal abortions since 1973, methods have become safer and the skills of the doctors performing them higher. Another advantage to legalized abortion is that it affords health personnel the opportunity to provide information on birth control, psychological counseling, and a medical support network to the pregnant woman. Perhaps, with such instruction, another unwanted pregnancy might be avoided. This is a far superior choice to a dirty backroom with an unskilled practitioner, or a do-it-yourself "coat hanger" job in a lonely bathroom. Prior to the legalization of abortion, one could charge an exaggerated fee for such a dangerous procedure. Today, with legalized abortion, the charge for a "uterine evacuation," performed in an outpatient clinic, generally runs about $150.00. So, not only has the cost of abortion been reduced, but also the cost to society of treating "botched" abortions.

Though abortion is sometimes necessary, it is, nevertheless, unpleasant. Yet it is not nearly as unpleasant as unwanted children from unwanted pregnancies. If the unwanted child is "fortunate", he/she may end up in an orphanage; the less fortunate frequently become victims of abuse, both physically and psychologically, and are even battered to death!

The "pro-lifers," the euphemism chosen by those who oppose abortion, contend there are many childless persons yearning for a child to adopt, and that abortion limits the availability of such children. It is true that abortion has limited the number of babies available for adoption, but it has also limited the number of unwanted children. Should a woman be forced to carry an unwanted child, possibly conceived through rape, in order to provide another woman with a child?

Many sensitive people who support abortion in principle nevertheless see it as a sad, even tragic, action. In this view, abortion is a reason for regret, but not for remorse or moral judgement. In the last analysis, it remains the woman's choice, on the principle of consent, as in any other medical or surgical treatment. This freedom of choice coerces no physician into doing an abortion, nor any patient into having one. The Supreme Court, by legalizing abortion, in January of 1973, did not enter into the ethical or moral question; yet, by finding for the non-personal view of fetal life, it put the choice where it really belongs, in the control of the pregnant woman.

This next writer begins engagingly by presenting the issue dramatically. Her first paragraph concludes with a question that summarizes the issue. When we get to her statement of position in the third paragraph, we are surprised to find that she believes Neo-Nazis deserve constitutional protections. She states her position emphatically. She then argues why Neo-Nazis deserve constitutional protection and why they should not be ignored. We can easily see many possibilities for argument and counterargument the writer passes over. The essay is nevertheless assertive and thoughtful, in the manner of a newspaper or magazine editorial.

Neo-Nazis Have Constitutional Rights

by Mako Nakayama

Adolf Hitler is dead and buried. There is no doubt about that. Yet, across the ocean in America, a society enters 1989 with a frightening problem to deal with, which, shockingly, finds its roots in Nazi Germany. Hitler would have been proud. A new brand of "Neo-Nazis" has come to recognizable power in American subculture. They carry on the Nazi ideology of Arian race superiority and do so with militant flair and barbaric brutality. The threat is present, serious, and, worst of all, it is finding no problems in preaching its doctrine. Media of every type have welcomed the Neo-Nazis with open arms, and, while basking in their sensationalism, have helped to spread their dangerous rhetoric. With such large scale publicity, a new question has inevitably risen: Should individuals and organizations such as the Neo-Nazis be allowed the protection of the first amendment so that they can continue to preach their prejudice, violence, and hatred?

Many have voiced a despising and fearful "no!" Members of society who have become aware of an equality between humans, and recognize the needless waste tied in with the emotion of hate, have become sick from being exposed to Neo-Nazi ignorance and want the organization silenced. Many reason that situations such as cross burnings call for measures beyond that of the Constitution. Concerned citizens do not wish to have the young, impressionable minds of America corrupted by the Neo-Nazis. Why help their cause? Isn't it obvious that we must revoke their freedom of speech and put a stop to their ability to advertise their beliefs.

Frankly, no. It isn't. Ignoring the constitutional rights of the Neo-Nazi organization as a measure to stop their cause is definitely not the answer. Such an

action would have numerous drawbacks and would not aid in halting their progress.

The Constitution is the basis upon which America's democracy is built, and freedom of speech is one of its most crucial protections. To make an exception to the First Amendment and go beyond its bounds would threaten the security of everyone's personal rights and liberties by weakening the document which protects them.

Furthermore, simply outlawing their message will not stop the Neo-Nazis. Their crusade of hatred goes beyond the law already; covering up their presence will only reduce the public awareness which is necessary to defeat their purpose. Sheltering our youth and catering to their naivete, in essence, makes them more vulnerable to the Neo-Nazis. Surely this society has not forgotten its attempts to ignore another threat to itself called AIDS, attempts which not only did not make the problems go away but increased them to nearly epidemic proportions. As with any society-threatening situation, Neo-Nazism included, ignorance only increases the danger.

The answer, therefore, to the Neo-Nazi problem is not quite so simple as revoking Constitutional rights. To abuse someone's rights in order to preserve someone else's is not acceptable. The Neo-Nazis are, after all, human. Sad, misled, hateful, and ignorant humans, but humans nonetheless. Society must educate itself and become aware that such qualities exist in humanity; and, most importantly, society must beware of them. Once the people whom the Neo-Nazis are attempting to reach are made aware of the organization and the dangers in what they preach, then the Neo-Nazi's public message will simply become a startling warning of what type of thinking to avoid and transcend. The Neo-Nazi's cries for racial segregation will then be a self-defeating action on the part of the organization.

Let the Neo-Nazis serve as a warning. Hitler may be dead and buried, but he's trying to make a comeback in America.

Guidelines for Writing Prompts for Controversial Issue

Controversial issue writing situations require writers to take a position on a current controversy and attempt to convince readers that the position is reasonable. Writers first orient their readers by carefully defining the issue. Since they write for readers who take a different position on the issue, writers must offer reasons and support for a position. They support their reasons with evidence, facts, examples, anecdotes, cases, comparisons or contrasts, analogy, or other means of inventive arguing. Writers anticipate and acknowledge readers' likely questions and objections.

All topics must be meaningful and accessible to students. Topics must avoid eliciting highly emotional responses and favoring a gender or cultural group.

Following are guidelines for drafting the writing situation and directions for writing for controversial issue prompts. Sample prompts model these guidelines.

Writing Situation

Identify a current controversial issue and describe it briefly in two to five sentences. Be particularly careful that the description presents the issue fairly, and does not inadvertently favor one position over the other. Your description should make it clear that the issue is a complex one, not capable of being resolved by a simple declaration of "right" vs. "wrong."

Then in a separate paragraph of two or three sentences, identify who is asking the student to write the essay (perhaps the students' teacher) or the source where it will be published (perhaps the local newspaper) or who will read it (perhaps other students). Ask the student to take a position on the controversial issue and provide a convincing argument in support of that position. Be sure to use the words *position* and *controversial issue*.

Directions for Writing

Begin the directions, "Write an essay taking a position on the issue of . . ." Be sure that the directions include these key terms: position, reasons, evidence, and convince or convincing. Invite students to define or explain the issue. Remind them that they must give reasons why readers should take their position seriously. Do not lead the student by suggesting any other rhetorical features of the controversial issue essay.

Mention again the reader or readers. Note that the readers must have a clear understanding of the issue and be convinced that the writer's position is reasonable and thoughtful. The final sentence or two should include the words *convince* or *purpose* or both.

Keep sentences relatively brief and vocabulary accessible. Title the prompt in a way that focuses students' attention on the writing situation.

Sample Prompts

This section presents several test-like prompts. In format and development each is like actual assessment prompts. Since we know that familiarity with a test's questions and time allotment improves students' confidence and performance, we recommend that students try a test prompt from this set (or from a set in another writing guide) a few days before the writing assessment.

We believe, however, that students' writing achievement cannot improve if students only practice test prompts. Achievement will improve in a challenging type of writing like controversial issue only if students compose and revise it for realistic writing situations in the classroom. This writing guide presents many fruitful classroom writing assignments and composing-process activities.

Should Children and Teenagers Watch Television Weekdays

Writing Situation. In some households parents are becoming increasingly angry at their children's television viewing habits. They argue that too much television watching reduces homework time and causes their children to become nonreaders. A number of parents have begun a crusade to persuade other parents to forbid their children to watch television on school days. Other parents have disagreed, saying that television has many benefits if people only monitor their viewing habits. The issue has become so controversial that people have been writing letters to the editor in the local newspaper, arguing their positions.

You decide to write a letter to the editor, too, arguing from the point of view of a teenager who might be directly affected by this crusade.

Directions for Writing. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper stating your position on the parents' crusade to eliminate television watching by children and teenagers on school days. Support your position with reasons and with anecdotes, examples, or evidence. Because other readers will disagree with you, anticipate their arguments, and present the strongest reasons supporting your position. Present your argument so that you will convince most of your readers to take your position seriously.

Taking a Position on Hunting for Sport

Writing Situation. Hunting is a popular sport in America. Thousands of people each year take to the woods, the mountains, and the deserts to hunt wild game. Hunters point out that state conservation departments permit hunting and set limits to control the numbers of animals in order to protect their environment. Animal rights advocates feel that killing animals for a sport is cruel. They claim that animal populations will balance themselves: if there are too many animals of one type, the older or weaker animals will starve. They propose that hunting should be banned by law.

Your English teacher has asked you to write an essay taking a position on this issue. What do you think? Should hunting be banned by law? Think about both sides of this issue and decide which position you support.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay for your English teacher presenting your position on this issue: Should hunting be banned by law? State your position and support it with reasons, facts, anecdotes, examples, or other evidence. Your goal is to convince your teacher that you have thought carefully about the issue and that your position is a reasonable one.

Use of Animals in Research

Writing Situation. Some research facilities use animals to study the effects of drugs or environmental pollution. People who think that using animals in this way is justified say that less time will be needed to develop new medicines or to protect against harmful environmental factors. Therefore, human lives will be saved. Those who are against using animals in this research say that exposing animals to possible pain and suffering and confining them in cages is wrong, no matter what the motive. Your science teacher has asked you to write an essay about this issue. Your readers will be the other members of your class, many of whom may disagree with your position. Your purpose in the essay is to convince the other students to take your position seriously.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay about this issue. State your position on using animals in science research. Support your position with reasons and with anecdotes, examples, or evi-

dence. Because many of your readers may not agree with you, anticipate their counterarguments, and present the strongest reasons supporting your position. Present your argument so that you will convince most of your readers to take your position seriously.

Minimum Wage Law

Writing Situation. Your government class has been discussing the minimum wage law. At present a minimum wage law protects workers from having to accept a wage so low that it cannot be considered a living wage. These workers are largely adults. However, numerous teenagers below the age of eighteen need employment, particularly during the summer months. These teenagers might be able to enter the labor market, learn some skills that would help them to gain employment later, and earn some money if businesses did not have to pay them the minimum wage. Some industries have indicated that employing teenagers below the age of eighteen would be possible if these industries were not held to paying these young workers a minimum wage.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay to be read to your government class for or against the proposed change in the minimum wage law. This proposed change would permit teenagers below the age of eighteen to be employed at some wage level set below the present minimum wage law. State your position and support it with reasons, examples, or evidence. Because other students will be arguing against your position, anticipate their arguments and answer them. Present the strongest reasons supporting your position. Present your argument so that you will convince most of the other students to take your position seriously.

Student Accountability

Writing Situation. In an effort to make students accountable for their grades and attendance, the local school board has instituted a program extending the athletic eligibility rules to all facets of high school life. Students must have a C average with no Fs in order to attend school dances, to run for office, and to participate in work-study programs. This new ruling has caused much controversy, so the school board is holding public hearings.

Directions for Writing. You plan to appear at the hearings to state your position on the "C average" rule. Write out what you will say to the school board. Others will be arguing against your viewpoint, so make your position clear and your reasons logical enough to be convincing.

Children of Divorce

Writing Situation. The effects of divorce on a family psychologically injure its members for years. Admittedly, the adults involved may be scarred for life because of their failed marriage. Sometimes, however, the children's feelings are largely ignored even though their suffering is much more intense than it at first appears. To ease some of this pain, many parents are postponing divorce until the children have grown up.

Directions for Writing. You have been selected to write an article for a teen magazine in which you state your opinion on this issue: Should parents postpone divorce for the good of their children? Because others reading your article may disagree with you, your viewpoint should be clearly, forcefully, and reasonably stated.

Dropping Out

Writing Situation. Schools around the country are giving gifts to students to keep them from dropping out. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, students with good attendance get TVs or stereos. In Napa, California, students with good grades receive store gift certificates. Many people don't like the idea. They say it makes students think they should be rewarded any time they do something well. People argue that the dropout problem is very complicated and that giving prizes doesn't address the problems that cause students to drop out.

Directions for Writing. Your school district is considering a reward program for good grades and good attendance, and the school superintendent has invited several students to write to him or her about their views on reward programs. The superintendent has intentionally chosen students with different views. Take a position on

this issue and write the superintendent a letter arguing your position with reasons and evidence. Convince him or her to take your position seriously.

Legalizing Drugs

Writing Situation. Some experts have proposed that the solution to society's problems with drug abuse is to legalize drugs. They argue that this would put an end to street crime involving drugs and to the huge profits to organized crime from selling drugs. The government could control drug sales; taxes from these sales could be used to cure addiction and educate the public about the dangers of drug use. These experts claim that present attempts to control drugs are a failure, and that legalization would at least help eliminate the violent crimes resulting from the illegal drug market. Other experts disagree. They believe legalizing drugs would increase drug abuse. People might think that if drug use is not illegal, the government thinks it is OK. They do not approve of the government getting into the business of selling dangerous drugs, and they feel street crime would actually increase if drugs became cheap and easily available. Clearly this question is a controversial one. What do you think about the proposal to legalize drugs?

Directions for Writing. Write an editorial for your school newspaper arguing either for or against the proposal to legalize drugs. You will need to define the issue and provide a reasonable argument for your point of view. You will want to consider the opposing point of view, and convince the reader that your position is more logical, using facts, examples, or other evidence in support of your position.

Note: These guidelines should not constrain classroom writing assignments or student writing projects. Good classroom assignments and projects may share certain features of these prompts—purposefulness, specific readers, suggestions about strategies—but classroom assignments need not observe the constraints on test prompts. These guidelines were designed solely to enable consultants to write prompts for the writing assessment.

Essays Written for the State Assessment

Here is a confident, authoritative writer. He writes coherently and gracefully; and, most important for a controversial issue essay, he understands fundamentally important argumentative strategies. An informed critical reader, certainly one who had closely followed the news from the Three-Mile Island and Chernobyl disasters, might feel that an unjustified rosy scenario underlies this student's argument; but the argument is nevertheless carried off impressively for a 45-minute first draft. The engaging opening image, appropriate use of specialized terms (fission, reactor, radioactive waste), references to Three-Mile Island and Chernobyl, precise diction (behemoth, skeletal, dispelled, jeopardy), and reasonable tone establish this writer's authority. In a surprisingly mature move, he first presents his opponent's position on the issue and then offers counterarguments. He then goes on to argue the benefits of nuclear power. Throughout, we have a sense of an argument proceeding with resistant readers' views in mind—an essential (and teachable) feature of writing about controversial issues.

High-range Achievement

A vast skeletal dome rises out of the earth. Construction workers, like so many ants, methodically move upon the face of the structure, adding huge slabs of concrete to the partially-completed behemoth. This is the future sight of a new nuclear power plant, authorized by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. When completed, this plant will replace the outdated natural gas power plants of the area, providing electrical power for thousands. But many are concerned that this nuclear reactor will put the public and the environment at risk. These concerns, however, are unfounded. As publicly held myths, they must be dispelled, so that the true benefits of nuclear power can become a reality for this area.

Many citizens fear that the installation of a nuclear power plant will put not only the environment, but the public health and safety in jeopardy. These people feel that the by-products of nuclear fission will necessitate the creation of toxic waste dumps to contain them. They also think that the presence of a nuclear reactor will kill off the local wild life. In addition, they worry that radiation from the reactor will put the local inhabitants at risk, especially should a nuclear accident similar to the ones at Chernobyl and Three-Mile Island occur.

These fears are uninformed. The radioactive waste produced by the plant will be very small in volume, and will be easily accommodated by existing safe

toxic waste disposal centers. Wildlife will be unaffected by the plant, which will be completely self-contained, and unable to emit harmful waste-heat. The public conception of radiation busting forth from the plant and harming employees and members of the community is an utter and complete myth. With the tons of shielding surrounding the reactor, far more radiation will be absorbed by employees from the sun than from the fission reaction. Finally, while the above-mentioned nuclear accidents were indeed horrendous, they served as reminders to the precautions necessary to run a nuclear plant. Thus, safety has in fact improved *as a result of the these catastrophes, insuring that the odds of such a disaster occurring in this ultra-modern nuclear plant are small indeed. Clearly, these dangers that are seen by opponents of the project are virtually non-existent, and will cease to be a factor once the public is informed.*

The benefits of such a plant, on the other hand, are clearly visible to all. A nuclear power plant will be a far more efficient power source than the natural-gas power plants it will replace. Electricity prices will fall and remain constant in the long run, as nuclear power is not vulnerable to the threats of middle-eastern oil-lords. In addition, the implementation of such a plant will bolster the local economy by providing hundreds of permanent jobs. The benefits that will be reaped from nuclear power will add immeasurable to the prosperity of the community.

Nuclear power, then, is without a doubt a worthwhile endeavor for this area. The costs of construction of the facility will be repayed many times over by the risk-free benefits afforded by a nuclear power plant. The N.R.C would clearly be well-advised to proceed at full speed with the development and construction of the power plant.

Like the writer of the six-point essay, the next writer knows the issue and writes authoritatively. We know her position, and we admire the way she qualifies it: she supports medical research but decries cosmetic-product experimentation. She believes that medical research should cause as little animal suffering as possible. Though the writer's argument stays on track, it lacks the balance and coherence of a six-point essay. Explicit concern with readers' objections and questions is not so obvious as in a six-point essay.

The use of animals in scientific research has been a controversial issue for decades. Scientists, doctors, and major manufacturing companies believe that research using animals is a legitimate practice. Animal rights activists, however, do not agree. While with most controversial issues there are only two sides, black and white, to an issue, I believe there is a shade of gray in this case.

I am strongly in favor of using laboratory animals for medical research. Laboratory animals include guinea pigs, rats, mice, and rabbits. No animal deemed of a "higher" intelligence than is normal for an animal, such as a pig or monkey, should be experimented on unless it is certain *no harm will come to them. Medical research is for medical cures only. The need for animals rather than humans to experiment on for cures to diseases such as tuberculosis, cancer, or cystic fibrosis and deadly viruses such as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is understandable. Cures need to be found and if "humane" experimentation will aid in finding them, then so be it.*

Inevitably, the other kind of experimentation must be brought to your attention. The cruel, painful, and abusive testing performed by large companies to assure product safety for the consumer. The manner in which the "scientific" research is allowed to continue is wrong. The government needs to secure a law preventing the use of animals in such laboratories.

The Gillette Company is a prime example. I recently received a letter from an animal rights activist group. They are trying to make more people aware of the cruelty being allowed by the United States Government. The letter explained, in great detail, the life, if you can call it that, of a laboratory animal. In one instance, an experiment on forty-five rabbits was put to an end. The rabbits were no longer of any consequence to the company, so they were destroyed. Each rabbit was pulled out of the tiny cages they had been confined to held in the air and jabbed with a "lethal" dose from a syringe. It was then thrown on the floor amongst other convulsing, dying rabbits.

Other tests include putting drops of perfume and deodorant products in the eyes of rabbits. If it burns and blinds them, it is a good product. Hair remover is tested on laboratory animals too. In one instance, it was too strong and ate through the flesh as the experimentors watched on.

I believe I have given more than adequate examples to persuade anyone with a heart to agree that only *medical researchers need to use animals for testing. Product experimentation is not necessary and is cruel and highly abusive. The use of animals in research should be brought a humane level. After all, each creature on this earth is one of the God's children. We all deserve the same respect.*

Mid-range Achievement (Score Point 4)

The following essay presents an energetic argument, but there is needless repetition (paragraphs 1 and 3) and the argument in paragraph 2 (if the legal drinking age is lowered from twenty-one to eighteen, students in that age group will drink less) is implausible. The "black cloud" metaphor seems exaggerated. And there is little, if any, attention to counterargument: the writer ignores newspaper readers' predictable

objections to lowering the legal drinking age. Nevertheless, this writer can make an assertive, coherent argument. It is easy to imagine a much-improved revision of this draft after a conference with a knowledgeable teacher or a well-coached peer group.

Dear Editor and all that this concerns:
I would like to call attention to a pitch black cloud of contradiction that has enveloped our state. Society has incressently taught the young that at eighteen years of age we become adults and are bound by the responsibilities of adults. We must dispel our adolescent irresponsibilities and assimilate into a mature part of our community. Legally and socially we are viewed as adults at eighteen. Then I ask why does the state impose a restriction on drinking for three years after one has reached "adulthood"? Does this not blatantly contradict the teachings and the laws of our society? Most obviously the answer is "Yes". So, I agree with the petitions that have been circulated calling for the lowering of the drinking age limit to eighteen because we are adults and we must make our own decisions.

Adolescents are full of rebellion and a desire for excitement. In the fact that teenager do, presently, drink alcohol we can see that a vast part of it is in its rebelliousness and excitement in acquiring it. The actual consumption of the alcohol is not all together the best part. So, if the drinking age is lowered teenagers might not find as much excitement, and definitely not any rebelliousness in consuming it. Sure, drinking will not become extinct but it may actually lower the frequency of using it because it would be so readily available.

Another major point is the fact that eighteen year olds are adults by every aspect of the word. At eighteen an individual can vote, an individual can be tried as an adult (no longer as a juvenile), and an individual can be drafted into a war where he may lose his own life, but according to the State of California he may not chose wether or not he wants to drink an alcoholic beverage! Show me the reasoning. Society teaches us to become responsible and at eighteen delegates all of the responsibilities of an adult to us. But then California turns around and treats us as children by not letting us choose our drinking habits. California has no logical choice but to lower the drinking age down to eighteen.

Eighteen year olds must have the freedom to make the decisions about their lives, including the decision to drink or not to drink. We are adults, in every fashion conceivable but we must also be uniformly treated as adults. Therefore the drinking age must be lowered, if not just to demonstrate a trust in our new "adults". This cloud that has covered our society must be overcome and in surmounting this task a society of more responsible citizens will emerge.

Mid-range Achievement (Score Point 3)

The American Family, an apple pie on the sink, boys playing baseball in the yard, dad taking in a ball game on the couch, and mom baking cookies in the kitchen. These are visions of what might have been.

Yet for millions of wed Americans this dream fails, and a divorce is the answer. A divorce may be extremely difficult for the couple, it is a large part of life gone wrong. Yet as responsible adults, this hurt was brought upon themselves, by themselves. For the children however, this is a enourmous trama that is not deserved. It is the losing of your family, their supposoubly most trusted source.

So when asked whether or not parents should postpone divorce I say a loud and clear yes. It is the parents responsibility.

Mid-range Achievement

In this mid-range essay, there is a clear thesis statement within the first paragraph. The thesis statement shows personal involvement, a moral stance, a clear stake in the controversy. The essay is written with conviction. The essay could profit from a cleanup—sentences run together with commas, "other" for "others," an unforeseen shift into second person *your class* in the final paragraph.

The essay represents mid-level achievement. While it has a strong thesis statement repeated at several points in the essay, it has only one developed argument and one image, comparing graduation to birth. The final paragraph, though still effective, becomes repetitive.

Graduation is the event all high school students look forward in attending. As a senior, I see the graduation ceremony to be a very important event *and thus, far too important to be cancelled for the whole by disruptive acts of a few.*

The graduation ceremony represents the closing of an experience, the high school experience. The place where thousands among thousands of students across the nation and the world spend four years being educated. It is like a event where all of the graduating members of your class comes together to celebrate four years of learning about themselves and others. It gives a graduate the feeling of achievement and acknowledgement for their hard work.

Graduation is a special moment in time for high school students, like the moment you experience when you first enter this world, and for you, that special event only happens once. Graduating from high school only occurs once for that student, is canceling the event for all worth the pain you deprive the others for actions of a few. If trouble is made by a graduate during the ceremony, deprive that graduate

the experience of graduating with your fellow students, but not the others. Is it worth it to cancel graduation for all? I say no! If a graduate decides to disrupt the ceremony, remove that graduate and let the other experience the one time experience of graduating from high school with your class. Don't let the actions of a few ruin it for all.

Here is another example of a mid-range paper. The writer gives a brief orientation to the issue of "couples only at the school dances" and states her position "I don't agree." The use of scenarios and rhetorical questions support the writer's position. Counterarguments are not addressed.

Couples Dance

I understand your point for having couples only at the school dances, but I don't necessarily agree.

One reason I don't agree is because it isn't fair to pair people up. Suppose you want to go to the dance with a special person, but are to shy or scared to ask them. You planned on maybe asking them to dance to loosen things up a little, well if you can't go to the dance single you loose that opportunity. And if you just go to the dance with a friend you may feel guilty to ask another to dance.

School is a independent place. What if your parents won't let you date yet or will not allow you to go to the dance with a partner? Does that mean just because you don't or can't have a boyfriend you can't participate in extra curricular activities? This just doesn't appear fair. Let's say you have a date to the dance and at the last minute your partner gets sick, changes their plans, or you have a disagreement. Does that mean you must sit home on a Friday night alone while all your other friends are having fun a the dance? These are legitimate reasons for not having dances only couples.

Another good point is what if you have a boyfriend that doesn't go to your school, you want to go to the dance and he doesn't you both agree that you will go to the dance and he'll do what he wants but if it has to be couples he probably wouldn't be happy as you wouldn't in the same situation? What happens? Your stuck.

Maybe you want to go to the dance with just your friends, it's the girls night out, that wouldn't be fair to only allow couples.

If you go with a partner you might feel compelled to only dance with them, or they might automatically assume you should only dance with them, what do you do then? What if they can't dance! The whole night could be monotonous!

So you see there's plenty of great reasons for allowing individuals to participate at the dances. It really isn't fair to have just couples because you eliminate all the others that would go but not with a partner. You also lose money. And as the saying goes, THE MORE THE MERRIER!

I hope you consider my presentation well and think it over before making a definite decision.

Low-range Achievement

Here is an example of a "low" paper written under testing conditions. Of the four areas addressed by the scoring guide (issue, position, support, and tone), only position is covered.

The writer opens with a position and thesis: "The Constitution must never be violated." The follow-up sentences are confusing generalizations rather than philosophical or emotional foundations for the position. No orientation to the issue is given, nor is there any clear support for the position taken.

A restatement of the position that "The Constitution is important and should never be violated . . ." is followed by vague threats against the violators. It is impressive that the student knows about Hobbes, but he is unable to put to good use whatever he might know about the English philosopher.

The writer appears to be confused about the Constitution and about democracy: "The country could be corrupt with a pure democracy so that is why it doesn't exist."

Patriotism: Constitutional or Unconstitutional

The Constitution must never be violated, it was written for the rights of the people. The people need ruling or else there would be turmoil and havoc among them so a democracy must have its limits.

According to the Hobbes Social Contract theory, people need some form of government to survive and if there wasn't, people would live a life of unrest. The Constitution is very important and should never be violated because it is one of the only governmental morals that the U.S. citizens can stand by. People that violate the Constitution must suffer the proper consequences.

If there is a democracy it must never be pure. The country could be corrupt with a pure democracy so that is why it doesn't exist. The Constitution was written by some men that were very well educated and had thought of what was right for the people to keep them under control.

I am obviously against the claim that sometimes democracy must be defended by methods that violate the Constitution. The over all aspect is that the Constitution is to important to be violated because it keeps a hand on people's privacy, rights and well being.

This next low-range essay takes a stand on the issue of whether AIDS testing should be mandatory when couples apply for a marriage license. The first three sentences state the issue, though incompletely, and the stand taken. The writer's omission of the word *married* leads to some confusion for the reader in understanding the issue, and the spelling of *provise* for *privacy* also confuses the reader. The writer's only support for her stand is that "no one should have to do something they don't want to" because "After all this is the land of the free." The lack of reader orientation to the issue to be discussed and the poverty of support mark this essay as low range.

To: State Legislator

I have read the bill you might pass about the aids testing before getting. I don't like it. I think a person should have his or hers provise.

If the persons wanted to take the test than let them. But no one should have to do something they don't want to. After all this is the land of the free.

Published Examples of Controversial Issue

This section offers three published essays taking positions on controversial issues, the first on whether schools should give students materialistic prizes for learning, the second and third on whether wild animals should be hunted and killed. These essays are useful in introducing students to the rhetorical possibilities and writing strategies of controversial issue essays.

The first essay engages readers with a startling list of prizes earned by the writer's three first-grade children. The writer then fully orients readers to the issue. She asserts her thesis in the second paragraph: ". . . I'm troubled by the fact that . . . children are being bombarded with rewards . . . ." She continues to expand on the issue itself, while she introduces judgments, questions, and speculations. She is concerned both with the causes (distorted application of current business principles) and effects (distorted values and suffering) of material rewards. The writer inventively creates support for her position—with examples, analogies, contrasts, and anecdotes.

The Prizes of First Grade[1]

by Paula Skreslet

In the first 10 days of the school year my triplets brought home the following from their first-grade classes: one candy bar, one peanut-butter and chocolate-chip cookie, two bags of popcorn, two "Very Important Person" badges, three "Constitutional Knowledge" stickers, one "I Know the Alphabet" award, two drawing prizes, 31 Nature Trail tickets, nine Lincoln play dollars, several music awards, some library awards, "Neater Eater" awards, playground-behavior awards and innumerable Scratch N Sniff stickers, stamps, stars and smile faces. What an introduction to the Lincoln School's positive-incentive program!

It's unusual, I know, for one family to have three six-year-olds, and perhaps that's why the prizes seem so excessive. But I'm troubled by the fact that well-behaved, attentive children are being bombarded with rewards for doing what should routinely be expected. My children are bewildered by the riches they've earned merely for being themselves.

My husband and I have taught them that politeness, learning and order are good things, and something good is to be desired and developed for its own sake. But at school they learned, and very quickly, that children earn Nature Trail tickets for running the quarter-mile track during lunch recess. Or Lincoln Dollars for picking up trash on the playground or for helping a younger child find the bathroom—deeds that used to be called "good citizenship." Furthermore, the school keeps score. The children can redeem trail tickets and play dollars for group prizes, like a free recess. Thanks to the involvement of local merchants, students can also earn a free order of French fries or free admission to the roller-skating rink.

Why is it necessary to buy the minimal cooperation of children with rewards and treats? Our school is no detention chamber. It is a bright, tidy building surrounded by acres of lawn where pupils follow their teachers into classrooms in a line like little ducks. And Caldwell, Idaho, is so homogeneous a town that we still teach kindergartners the story of Jesus at Christmas time, and nobody thinks twice about it. What is new to me, what I question philosophically, is the idea that good behavior must be reinforced so systematically that without tangible incentives, the first graders won't return their library books when due. Or that they won't learn the alphabet without stickers, stars and candy bars.

An inner-city high school in Cleveland received a lot of press attention recently when it began to experiment with a program of paying students for their grades. Each student is to receive $40 for an A, $20 for a B and $10 for a C. The amount earned will be

[1]Paula Skreslet, "The Prizes of First Grade," *Newsweek* (November 30, 1987), 8.

credited toward a scholarship fund that students can apply to college tuition or for vocational training. In that respect financial aid based on performance is no shocking innovation. But the commercialism of paying for each notch on the grade-point average seems a bit much. It shamelessly assigns a dollar value to levels of learning that can scarcely be measured symbolically, much less in coin. It also says that students are so materialistic, so unmotivated and lazy that they will not learn without a bribe. I find that an insulting idea.

What I think we're seeing in Cleveland and at the Lincoln Schools is the well-meant but distorted application of a current business principle—the vogue that stresses excellence and its corollary, competitiveness. We've convinced ourselves that the way to safeguard America's position in commerce and science is to appeal to young people's hunger for the rewards the market place can provide. Thomas J. Peters, in his influential book, "In Search of Excellence," writes: "Get the incentives right and productivity will follow. If we give people big, straightforward monetary incentives to do right and work smart, the productivity problem will go away."

Widget factories: Peters lists McDonald, AT&T, Tupperware, IBM as companies that use "pins, buttons, badges and medals" to boost performance. He especially applauds programs that reward the majority of workers who can be tempted to perform a bit better than before. I don't know enough about the application of this principle in the business world, but I do know it's inappropriate in the first grade. Public and nonprofit institutions are not widget factories. Learning involves developing the intellect and character of a child—it's not a productivity problem that can be solved solely by a particular performance.

What I'm trying to do with my children is to teach them how to respond to challenges, how to contribute to the community even at their own expense. Secretary of Education William Bennett visited Caldwell last year and presented Lincoln with a plaque for being an exemplary school—an honor given to just 270 grade schools in the United States. Yet I'm afraid that with the best of intentions, the school may be my adversary instead of my ally. If children are taught to behave decently because they will profit from it, I wonder what principle will guide them as adults when they see how easy it is to profit from wrong behavior.

Some children at the Lincoln School have already discovered that they can skip running the quarter-mile track and simply pressure younger children into handing over their Nature Trail tickets. It isn't the idea of healthy exercise that's motivating them. I believe that's what happens if we are taught to value a prize, a payoff, rather than a good that is to be sought without any accessory advantage—such as justice, or honor.

I've lost count of the prizes my triplets have earned so far. They are well on their way to coming out winners in this scramble of enhanced self-interest. But I can't forget about the little boy who didn't remember to return his book and kept the whole class from getting its library star, or the girl who talked in line so the class didn't get a playground award. The winners will also suffer if they don't discover for themselves that they can gain the pleasure of health and strength from exercise, the joy of music from songs, the power of mathematics from counting, and all of human wisdom from reading. I'm going to do my utmost to teach my children about these rewards.

In the two articles that follow, the writers take opposite stands on the issue of hunting, on the rights of animals. Notice how the first writer, a hunter, carefully refutes the arguments of those who oppose hunting and then offers what he feels is the ultimate justification for it. The second writer opposes hunting and attempts to indicate that there is no real justification for it now or for the exploitation of animals. Notice how the second writer tries to refute some of the very justifications for hunting offered in the first article.

In Defense of Hunting[2]

by John C. Dunlap

"What are your moral justifications for hunting?"

The man who asked me this is my neighbor, a well-educated and thoughtful newcomer to our little valley in northeast Vermont. He and his partner have just built a small house across the way. We want to be friends; there are going to be difficulties.

My first reaction is to trot out all the standard, unconvincing arguments about game management, about hunting as a last vestige of our primitive selves. It's easy, after so many years of assault, to feel defensive about this subject. Instead, I have a Socratic inspiration.

"What are your justifications for not hunting?" I ask.

So I get to listen to his standard, unconvincing arguments: the sacredness of life; the obligation not to interfere with its mechanisms; the storm of death; the suffering; the continuing evolution of man.

The hypocrisy of all this is staggering.

The only opponents of hunting I'll listen to for long are vegetarians. I won't listen for a minute to meat eaters who pay the butcher and supermarket to kill, package and distribute their meats. But even the sophistic arguments of the vegetarians inevitably irritate me. It's funny, they all think I'm kidding when I ask if plants feel pain. Plants can fill their lives with peace, and their stomachs with nourishment; plant life fashions dazzling displays of color and shape and

[2] John Dunlap, "In Defense of Hunting," *Newsweek*, Vol. 101 (March 7, 1983), 12–13.

even responds to classical music. But when the gardener approaches with pruning shears, suddenly plants are numb and indifferent.

I am not a theologian who can argue complicated precepts of morality. I am, I hope, a reasonably intelligent and sensitive man who tries to think clearly about what he does. And what I do is hunt, and sometimes kill.

So who doesn't? Does the power that orchestrates affairs in our universe accord a deer more importance than a fly quivering in a strip of sticky tape? Show me where. No sensible person will argue that significance is related to size—but there are few advocates of the small.

The universe shows no less enthusiasm in exterminating life than in creating it. What do all the opponents of hunting think the sweet-singing "feathered glories" are doing, carving graceful arcs in the evening air? They're killing, just as fast as they can. Even doves, man-made symbols of gentleness, pick through the farmer's silage bins down the road, looking for juicy bugs to snip in half and devour. And the jewel-like trout, darting among the mossy rocks—they're busy killing, too. The foxes and bobcats of our forests are predators as well, and it's fortunate for their prey that they are. As wise Theseus points out at the conclusion of Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," death is forever busy "Converting all things back into the source / from which they were derived, to which they course."

Urban moralists so often seem to have an image of hunting seasons as bloody free-for-alls. They know virtually nothing about the fish and game departments' endless and difficult assessments of herd size and habitat quality. How many "friends of wildlife" have tramped through the deep snows of early April to count the many thousand deer carcasses strewn through the woods? Not many, I bet. Can this "natural" solution to excessive animal numbers be acceptable to them? We interfere everywhere else to keep living things happy and healthy and call it progress—but not here. Just as surely as you can rob a man with a pen, so too can deer be killed with good intentions. If we were to outlaw hunting, millions of beasts would suffer and die each year as they competed for limited feed. In fact, social and economic developments have so altered the habitat that we must now assume increased responsibility to manage wildlife intelligently. Who pays for this management? The hunters pay, with their licenses; the opponents talk.

The intelligence and practicality of game management in the form of hunting seasons were proved to me long ago. Most state departments of fish and game have excellent literature explaining their policies and practices better than I am able to do here. I suggest this as beginning reading material for those who condemn hunting; I have yet to argue this issue with someone who was genuinely well informed.

Then again, it seems clear that opponents of hunting fashion their moral stance not on a cosmic model, as they so often say, but on a merely human one. Indeed, arguments on both sides usually come down to passions, and these interest me most. For just as the urban world has largely been stripped of its wildness, our cities and suburbs poisoned and thoroughly paved over, it is possible that, given enough time, our very instincts will suffer the same fate: our mysterious inner forests cut down, our spiritual waters polluted and dammed. Paradoxically, hunting—which deals in death—can intensify our understanding of life.

So, how can I do it? I go hunting because I cannot resist prowling about in the dark mornings and the umber dusks—the cracks, as I have heard them described, between the worlds. I go to have shadowy, sometimes violent encounters with my brother animals. I go to watch a silent, indifferent power fill the woods, and see the woods awed in it presence.

The Rights of Animals[3]

by Brigid Brophy

Were it announced tomorrow that anyone who fancied it might, without risk of reprisals or recriminations, stand at a fourth-story window, dangle out of it a length of string with a meal (labelled 'Free') on the end, wait till a chance passer-by took a bite and then, having entangled his cheek or gullet on a hook hidden in the food, haul him up to the fourth floor and there batter him to death with a knobkerrie, I do not think there would be many takers.

Most sane adults would, I imagine, sicken at the mere thought. Yet sane adults do the equivalent to fish every day: not in panic, sexual jealousy, ideological frenzy or even greed—many of our freshwater fish are virtually inedible, and not one of them constitutes a threat to the life, love or ideology of a human on the bank—but for amusement. Civilization is not outraged at their behavior. On the contrary: that a person's hobby is fishing is often read as a guarantee of his sterling and innocent character.

The relationship of homo sapiens to the other animals is one of unremitting exploitation. We employ their work; we eat and wear them. We exploit them to serve our super-institutions: whereas we used to sacrifice them to our gods and tear out their entrails in order to foresee the future, we now sacrifice them to Science and experiment on their entrails in the hope—or on the mere off-chance—that we might thereby see a little more clearly into the present. When we can think of no pretext for causing their death and no profit to turn it to, we often cause it nonetheless, wantonly, the only gain being a brief pleasure for ourselves, which is usually only marginally bigger

[3]Brigid Brophy. "The Rights of Animals," in *Don't Never Forget: Collected Views and Reviews*. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

than the pleasure we could have had without killing anything; we could quite well enjoy our marksmanship or cross-country galloping without requiring a real dead wild animal to show for it at the end.

It is rare for us to leave wild animals alive; when we do, we often do not leave them wild. Some we put on display in a prison just large enough for them to survive, but not in any full sense to live, in. Others we trundle about the country in their prisons, pausing every now and then to put them on public exhibition performing, like clockwork, 'tricks' we have trained into them. However, animals are not clockwork but instinctual beings. Circus tricks are spectacular or risible as the case may be precisely because they violate the animals' instinctual nature—which is precisely why they ought to violate both our moral and our aesthetic sense.

But where animals are concerned humanity seems to have switched off its morals and aesthetics—indeed, its very imagination. Goodness knows those facilities function erratically enough in our dealings with one another. But at least we recognize their faultiness. We spend an increasing number of our cooler moments trying to forestall the moral and aesthetic breakdowns which are liable, in a crisis, to precipitate us into atrocities against each other. We have bitter demarcation disputes about where the rights of one man end and those of the next man begin, but most men now acknowledge that there are such things as the rights of the next man. Only in relation to the next animal can civilized humans persuade themselves that they have absolute and arbitrary rights—that they may do anything whatever that they can get away with.

The reader will have guessed in some detail by now what sort of person he confronts in me: a sentimentalist; probably a killjoy; a person with no grasp on economic realities; an anthropomorphist, who attributes human feelings (and no doubt human names and clothes as well) to animals, and yet actually prefers animals to humans and would sooner succor a stray cat than an orphan child; a latter-day version of those folklore English spinsters who in the nineteenth century excited the ridicule of the natives by walking round Florence requesting them not to ill-treat their donkeys; and par excellence, of course, a crank.

Well. To take the last item first: if by 'crank' you mean 'abnormal', yes. My views are shared by only a smallish (but probably not so small as you think) part of the citizenry—as yet. Still, that proves nothing either way about the validity of our views. It is abnormal to be a lunatic convinced you are Napoleon, but equally (indeed, numerically considered, probably even more) abnormal to be a genius. The test of a view is its rationality, not the number of people who endorse it. It would have been cranky indeed in the ancient world to raise the question of the rights of slaves—so cranky that scarcely a voice went on record as doing so. To us it seems incredible that the Greek philosophers should have scanned so deep into right and wrong and yet never noticed the immorality of slavery. Perhaps three thousand years from now it will seem equally incredible that we do not notice the immorality of our oppression of animals.

Slavery was the ancient world's patch of moral and aesthetic insensitivity. Indeed, it was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of our own era that the human conscience was effectively and universally switched on in that respect. Even then, we went on with economic and social exploitations which stopped short of slavery only in constitutional status, and people were found to justify them. But by then the exploiters had at least been forced onto the defensive and felt obliged to produce the feeble arguments that had never even been called for in the ancient world. Perhaps it is a sign that our conscience is about to be switched on in relation to animals that some animal-exploiters are now seeking to justify themselves. When factory farmers tell us that animals kept in 'intensive' (i.e. concentration) camps are being kindly spared the inclemency of a winter outdoors, and that calves do not mind being tethered for life on slats because they have never known anything else, an echo should start in our historical consciousness: do you remember how the childlike blackamoors were kindly spared the harsh responsibilities of freedom, how the skivvy didn't feel the hardship of scrubbing all day because she was used to it, how the poor didn't mind their slums because they had never known anything else?

The first of the factory farmers' arguments is, of course, an argument for ordinary farms to make better provision for animals in winter, not for ordinary farms to be replaced by torture chambers. As for the one about the animals' never having known anything else, I still shan't believe it valid but I shall accept that the factory farmers genuinely believe it themselves when they follow out its logic by using their profits to finance the repatriation of every circus and zoo animal that was caught in the wild, on the grounds that those have known something else.

Undismayed by being a crank, I will make you a free gift of another stick to beat me with, by informing you that I am a vegetarian. Now, surely, you have me. Not only am I a more extreme crank, a member of an even smaller minority, than you had realized; surely I must, now, be a killjoy. Yet which, in fact, kills more joy: the killjoy who would deprive you of your joy in eating steak, which is just one of the joys open to you, or the kill-animal who puts an end to all the animal's joys along with its life?

If we are going to rear and kill animals for our food, I think we have a moral obligation to spare them pain and terror in both processes, simply because they are sentient. I can't prove they are sentient; but then I have no proof you are. Even though you are articulate, whereas an animal can only scream or struggle, I have no assurance that your "It hurts" expresses anything like the intolerable sensations I experience in pain. I know, however, that when I

visit my dentist and say "It hurts," I am grateful that he gives me the benefit of the doubt.

The most genuine and painful clash is, of course, on the subject of vivisection. To hold vivisection never justified is a hard belief. But so is its opposite. I believe it is never justified because I can see nothing (except our being able to get away with it) which lets us pick on animals that would not equally let us pick on idiot humans (who would be more useful) or, for the matter of that, on a few humans of any sort whom we might sacrifice for the good of the many. If we do permit vivisection, here if anywhere we are under the most stringent minimum obligations. The very least we must make sure of is that no experiment is ever duplicated, or careless, or done for mere teaching's sake or as a substitute for thinking.

Our whole relation to animals is tinted by a fantasy—and a fallacy—about our toughness. We feel obliged to demonstrate we can take it; in fact, it is the animals who take it. So shy are we of seeming sentimental that we often disguise our humane impulses under 'realistic' arguments: fox hunting is snobbish: factory-farmed food doesn't taste so nice. But fox hunting would still be an atrocity if it were done by authenticated, pedigreed proletarians, and so would factory-farming even if a way were found of making its corpses tasty. So, incidentally, would slavery, even if it were proved a hundred times more economically realistic than freedom.

The saddest and silliest of the superstitions to which we sacrifice animals is our belief that by killing them we ourselves somehow live more fully. We might live more fully by entering imaginatively into their lives. But shedding their blood makes us no more full-blooded. The bullfighter who torments a bull to death and then castrates it of an ear has neither proved nor increased his own virility; he has merely demonstrated that he is a butcher with balletic tendencies.

Superstition and dread of sentimentality weight all our questions against the animals. We don't scrutinize vivisection rigorously—we somehow think it would be soft of us to do so, which we apparently think a worse thing to be than cruel.

In point of fact, I am the very opposite of an anthropomorphist. I don't hold animals superior or even equal to humans. The whole case for behaving decently to animals rests on the fact that we are the superior species. We are the species uniquely capable of imagination, rationality and moral choice—and that is precisely why we are under the obligation to recognize and respect the rights of animals.

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High School Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide

Controversial Issue

In controversial issue, writers choose a position and try to persuade their readers that the position is valid. The best writers orient the readers by defining the issue. There will be a clear assertion, a thesis statement giving the writer's position. This thesis will be supported by convincing arguments that may appeal to logic, emotions, and philosophical arguments.

Prompts about controversial issues ask writers to take a stand and support that stand through reasoning and evidence. These prompts also remind writers that some readers may not agree with the writer's position; therefore, writers must anticipate arguments, as well as present strong reasons for readers to take the writer's position seriously.

While the *rhetorical* aspect of the assessment focuses on the distinctive features of writing types, the *effectiveness* aspect guides us to look carefully at the more comprehensive features of coherence and style. Coherence, a sense of organization, flow, and focus, is essential to all good writing. The coherent essay has a clear direction, each section flowing naturally from the preceding one. Coherence is demonstrated to readers through emphasis, organization, and repetition achieved through recurrences of language, syntax, and ideas. Style, for the purposes of this assessment, is observable in two written language features: (1) *sentence control* and (2) *word choice* or *diction*. In assessment of the effectiveness of style, the primary considerations are *appropriateness*, *precision*, and *control*.

Score Point 6 – Exceptional Achievement

Issue. More than in any other form of writing, writers of argumentation must establish themselves as informed, knowledgeable individuals often with a stake in the issue at hand.

Writers orient readers by clearly *defining* and *focusing* the controversial issue. They define terms. They acknowledge, perhaps implicitly, that reasonable people disagree on such issues and that controversy is based on matters of opinion and judgment. More than any other kind of writing, argument also requires writers to consider and analyze their audience. To clearly define the issue and provide context for the audience, writers may use strategies such as the following:

- An appeal to logic through reasoning based on fact
- An appeal to emotions through connotative language or through figurative language that engages the emotions
- An appeal to ethical beliefs through philosophical arguments
- Rhetorical questions
- Personal anecdote
- Examples
- Scenario
- Case study
- Analogy

Position. Writers take an authoritative stand on the controversial issue. A strong position or stand based on a clearly focused thesis impresses the reader with its power and unity. A superior thesis often forecasts the arguments used. For example, a simple thesis may be that nuclear power plants should be abolished. A more powerful thesis statement might be that the hazards of nuclear power outweigh all potential benefits. Thoughtful writers may present circumstances or conditions that might alter their position on the issue. The thesis may be restated or clearly implied in a number of different ways throughout the essay.

Support. Writers support a convincing argument with sound reasoning and solid evidence. The writer of a six-point essay shows strong control of word choice to identify the issue and maintain an appropriate tone. The writer exhibits exceptional control of sentence structure and maintains connections between ideas. The overall essay has a consistently smooth movement forward.

Writers acknowledge the audience and anticipate counterarguments. They may accommodate

valid counterarguments by conceding a point. Writers refute invalid or irrelevant arguments with substantial evidence and sound reasoning. They may use questioning techniques in order to advance their position.

Writers may convince readers through logic, using thoughtful support; through emotional appeals, arousing the readers' feelings about the issue; or through an appeal to authority. Writers of six-point papers may go well beyond the expected response. Convincing writers effectively use reasonable support, emotional appeals, or philosophical beliefs in presenting their arguments. The strongest argument, the strongest reasoning is given the most space in the composition. Writers argue energetically and convincingly for their position. They may develop their arguments by using the full gamut of writing and reasoning, such as the following:

- Anecdotes
- Personal experience
- Examples and details
- Commonly accepted beliefs
- Expert opinion
- Quotations of lines or passages from literature
- Cause and effect reasoning
- Comparison/contrast reasoning
- Hypothetical situation
- Analogy
- Logical syllogisms
- Rhetorical questions
- Anticipation and acknowledgment of counterarguments (accommodating valid arguments; refuting invalid arguments)

Tone. Writers of six-point papers are committed to their position and sincere in their desire to persuade the audience to their point of view. Writers establish their authority as proponents of the position and build bridges of trust to encourage the reader's acceptance of their position.

The attitude conveyed by tone should suit the nature of the audience and the argument. Language is consistently used with precision and appropriateness. The writer may employ specific images and allusions to enhance and strengthen the appeal of the argument. A convincing tone conveys trust and credibility, emphasizes conviction and commitment, and enhances credibility. The tone of a six-point paper clearly creates a favorable impression so that readers take the writer's position seriously.

Score Point 5 – Commendable Achievement

Issue. Writers orient and accommodate their readers by providing context, clearly defining and focusing the controversial issue. They may not engage readers as skillfully or be as aware of the audience throughout the essay as in a six-point paper. Strategies employed in orienting readers are not as extensive as those used by writers of six-point papers.

Position. Writers of five-point papers take a strong stand on the issue and maintain a consistent position throughout the essay.

Support. Writers support a convincing argument with sound reasoning and solid evidence. Counterarguments are both acknowledged and addressed but may not be as effectively refuted as they are in a six-point paper. The essay is well organized; however, the connections between sections or within a given section may lack the smoothness of the six-point paper. A five-point essay shows the writer's ability to use words appropriately and with precision and control; however, word choice may show less versatility than the six-point essay. The writer exhibits sustained control of a variety of sentence structures. The paper may not have the rich support reflected in a six-point paper nor is the central argument as carefully developed. Writers may employ fewer techniques, or there may be some gaps in logic, reasoning, and support.

Tone. A five-point paper has a convincing tone that is both reasonable and appropriate, but may be less engaging than a six-point paper.

Score Point 4 – Adequate Achievement

Issue. Writers state the issue but do not orient nor engage readers with the same sophistication or development that is employed by writers of five- and six-point papers. The writer provides less context for the issue.

Position. Writers of four-point papers take a firm stand on the issue. The stance is clear and consistent but less authoritative; it may be more simplistic and lack the commitment of a five- or six-point paper.

Support. Writers support the position taken with some logical, relevant arguments and evidence. Counterarguments may be acknowledged

but not adequately addressed. Reasons may not be as thoughtful nor as extensive as those found in a five- or six-point paper. Writers may fail to develop a central argument. The reasoning is often predictable or lacking in depth. Some details may seem extraneous, interrupting the forward movement of the essay. The overall structure may seem formulaic. The essay shows a sustained control of sentence structures, but it may have less variety than the five- and six-point essays.

Tone. Word choice and tone are appropriate but not dynamic. Writers may occasionally use cliches.

Score Point 3 – Some Evidence of Achievement

Issue. Writers may provide a brief explanation of the issue. Recognition of the reader may be perfunctory.

Position. Writers of three-point papers take a stand, but the stance may waver or appear inconsistent to the reader. The thesis may not be easily identifiable.

Support. Arguments may be quickly sketched and may seem confused. Reasons may be brief and unelaborated. There may be extraneous details, digressions, and repetitions that hamper the forward movement of the essay. Writers may fail to acknowledge counterarguments, or they may simply list reasons or digress rather than develop a central argument.

Tone. The tone is neither engaging nor authoritative; it may be unconvincing, flippant, or unsure. Its effect or impression on the reader is negligible. The word choice is usually appropriate to the content; however, the writer may rely on general rather than specific language. There is little sentence variety, although the writer of the three-point essay shows basic control of simple sentences.

Score Point 2 – Limited Evidence of Achievement

Issue. Writers may briefly name the issue or respond to it without addressing it directly; writers provide little or no orientation of the subject to the reader.

Position. Writers of two-point papers may not take a stand or may veer from or abandon their stand. These should not be confused with papers in which writers provide a thoughtful examination of conditions under which their stance might change. There is no clear thesis.

Support. The overall structure of the essay is weak. Writers may not give reasons. The evidence presented may be vague, irrelevant, or illogical. Repetition, digressions, and gaps break the forward movement. The writer exhibits little control of sentence structure.

Tone. The tone is flat, or it may be unreasonable or contradictory, resulting in an unfavorable impression on the reader. Word choice may be inappropriate.

Score Point 1 – Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Issue. Writers may not state the issue or address the reader.

Position. No stand; no thesis.

Support. No reasons or evidence may be given. Brevity and confusion are characteristic of a one-point essay. There is little evidence of organization or forward movement.

Tone. Writers may be unsure or confused by the task.

Unscorable – Inappropriate Response

Off topic. No response. Written in a foreign language.

High School Writing Guide

Evaluation

In evaluation the writer presents a judgment based on a critical assessment of a particular subject. The judgment is supported with a convincing, well-reasoned discussion, using specific criteria. In an effective evaluation the writer speaks with authority on the subject.

Evaluation, which is one of the foundational thinking approaches, occurs as a strategy in other state assessment writing types. It is most closely related, however, to interpretation and controversial issue. In interpretation, the writer analyzes a subject—a work of art, an experiment, a poem—to discover meaning. In controversial issue, the writer examines the subject in order to establish a position toward it. Although these three types of writing rely on similar approaches, their purposes differ. In evaluation, however, the writer establishes criteria and makes a clear judgment about the worth of a subject.

Importance of Evaluations

Writers may evaluate by using personal judgments about what they experience, hear, and see as well as by citing external authority and drawing on what they read and what other people say about a subject.

When they become adults, students will be faced with making significant evaluative decisions—whether to go to college, what job to take, where to live, and so on. Exploring decisions in writing can help them to focus on evaluating several aspects of the situation before they make a final decision. Consequently, the processes to be learned through writing effective evaluations go far beyond a classroom essay; they have lifelong implications.

Characteristics of Evaluation

The writer of evaluation makes a judgment about a specific subject and supports, explains, or validates that judgment through the use of evidence. The writer must formulate or choose criteria on which to base the judgment. An awareness of audience determines what information to present about the subject being evaluated, and what biases or limitations to consider in addressing specific audiences. Voice and tone convey the writer's attitude toward the subject. The writer focuses the subject to be evaluated, orienting readers so that they can follow the argument.

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Judgment

Evaluation requires a judgment based on the thoughtful examination of the subject. Implied or stated, the judgment makes an assertion about the subject's worth.

Evaluation is more than the simple expression of likes and dislikes. Although personal preference may be a factor, evaluation depends on a critical assessment of the subject based on logically formulated criteria. The selection of criteria is crucial in that it often determines how effectively the judgment can be supported and may even determine what judgment is made.

Criteria

In drafting effective evaluations, writers identify criteria integral to the subject being evaluated. These criteria may focus on the subject's importance or unique qualities. Often the writer chooses criteria that are traditionally and specifically associated with the subject. For example, climate, points of interest, and cost are criteria often used in evaluating vacation spots. In a testing situation, students may be asked to evaluate the quality or appropriateness of a poem or short story using criteria previously determined by the teacher, the class, or an external authority such as a literary critic. Sometimes, through a personal understanding of the subject, the writer may develop his or her own criteria.

The category of the subject often helps the writer to determine appropriate criteria. For instance, deciding which movie is more successful—*Star Wars* or *Grapes of Wrath*—depends on whether the writer selects "socially significant" or "technically innovative" as the dominant criteria. Choosing dramatic camera angles, startling special effects, and subtle editing leads to one judgment; choosing such criteria as accurate depiction of a problem, ability to influence attitudes, and power to bring about social change leads to another. The writer of a successful evaluation essay presents criteria clearly and applies them consistently in assessing the subject.

Evidence

Evaluation presents clearly stated, well-developed, and convincing evidence to support each judgment. A number of strategies are available to the writer, such as the following:

- Analyze the subject.
- Compare and contrast subjects in the same category.
- Include personal experience or the experience of others.
- Cite authorities.
- Cite lines from a passage, literary work, movie, or song.
- Observe specimens, as in a study of plants or animals.
- Take notes of procedures in experiments.

Audience

Awareness of audience, which determines how much and what type of background information the writer must include, governs the strategies writers use in their evaluation and influences the tone of the essay. The writer of evaluation maintains a consistently authoritative tone. Although writers may entertain other points of view as they build their arguments, they always keep their own positions clear. The voice of more skillful writers is confident and committed; the writer's attitude toward the subject is explicit, evident, and consistent.

To orient and accommodate the reader to the subject being evaluated, the writer may use a variety of strategies such as the following:

- Devise beginnings that clearly acquaint readers with the subject.
- Describe the subject, its characteristics, and significance.
- Provide information the audience may not know.
- Describe personal experiences or feelings associated with them.
- Address the audience's concerns.
- Direct some concluding remarks to the audience.

Exemplary Student Essay

Love at First Mini-Byte

I'm having an intimate relationship with my computer. Nestled in my lap, my lean, compact Zenith-181 invites opening. A lifting of the hinged lid uncovers a pristine keyboard and reveals a dark window in the lid. Power on, and the window turns a lustrous pearl grey on which reassuring blue letters glow. In a dark room its effect is aqueous, like watching luminescent tropical fish glide by in a deep sea vault, ever so comforting, ever so gentle on the eyes.

[Startling opening sentence captures attention and interest. Alluring description entices the readers.]

Lest you think I am developing an as-yet-undefined but nonetheless perverted Freudian relationship with my computer, let me explain my affinity. I own a personal computer, and it serves me well. But it is not mobile. Unless you call hauling a computer in my Volkswagen "mobile." A few years ago "portables" emerged on the scene. They resemble small movie projectors, and well-muscled business executives lug them around. Then along came the Z-181 and its compatriots, so-called "laptop" computers. These elfin wonders with one-fifth the size but more than twice the memory of their desktop cousins of a year ago, have another advantage over their peers: they're cute. I can kiss mine for writing an "A" essay, clutch it to my chest for comfort and consolation, or swing it with careless abandon as I skip joyously to school. It is my companion. More than simply personal, it's as intimate as my toothbrush, a confidential partner, at my side, on my mind, under my fingertips.

[Writer's voice, tone, humor, personal interaction immediately engage reader. A brief history of personal computers orients reader and provides information reader may not know. Effective ploy: to use affectionate, intimate terms to describe technical object—an arresting combination. Infusion of personal experience, personal reaction.]

But cooler sorts are convinced by data. Here come some, straight from the manual: 640K memory; two 3.5-inch disk drives, each storing 720K (twice the storage of a normal PC); running speed of 4.77 megahertz; interfaces with external 5.25 disk drive; fully MS-DOS compatible; AC converter/recharger; weight a little over eleven pounds; cost $2000, a price tag only the son of the generous president of a computer company can afford. But the price, as with most computers, will decrease in time.

[Addresses needs of "cooler," knowledgeable readers with data.]

Software for laptop computers is a major problem, but not an insurmountable one. Most MS-DOS programs exist on 5.25-inch floppies, not 3.5-inch disks. But many fully equipped computer stores will transfer MS-DOS software from 5.25-inch to 3.5-inch formats. Also, if you already own a PC, you can buy a program called The Brooklyn Bridge, link your PC and laptop to create one machine with four disk drives, and transfer files from 5.25- to 3.5-inch or vice versa.

[Presents abundant concrete evidence. By acknowledging software problem, again answers possible audience resistance.]

Although laptops are marketed as executive accessories, the Z-181 is a perfect introduction for a computer neophyte. Its resemblance to a portable typewriter with a lid reassures the uninitiated threatened by more massive equipment. It requires no assembly; batteries are included. Just open it up, switch it on, and away you go. The small screen looks "just like Etch A Sketch," as one of my friends said. And it does, except it can do so much more than just duplicate doodles.

[More evidence, this time reassuring the intimidated computer neophyte.]

Data General and NEC produce fine laptop computers, but the Toshiba T1100 Plus is probably the most popular. Their more recent model, the T3100, is a powerhouse laptop for big boys and girls who do more than duplicate doodlings or write essays, who probably crush atoms or crunch conglomerates for a living.

[Citing of other models, brands; appropriate, clever alliteration.]

I prefer the Z-181 over other models for several reasons. Primo, my generous president of a computer company father gave it to me. Segundo, that luminescent, easy-on-the-eyes screen. Most laptops have screen displays of liquid crystal, like a calculator's, visible only in good light. The Z-181 glows legibly even in near-dark. It's because of something called a "backlit supertwisted birefringent screen" which sounds like two tortured Amanas to me. Whatever it is, it makes for easy viewing. Additionally, the Z-181 does not suffer from the malady of many laptops: squashed screen displays producing the fun-house mirror effect of stunted, squat shapes. The Z-181 screen produces the same proportions as my desktop PC, so the only distortions of reality appear in my mind, not on the screen.

[Still more evidence in support of judgments; sound reasons with humorous overtones.]

In this post-transistor, microchip world, small is beautiful and portable is progress. In the movie Peggy Sue Got Married, *Peggy Sue through her 1950's eyes foresees that "In the future, everything gets smaller, except portable radios." Even the ghetto-blaster may give way to the Walkman and to the compact disc player. Twenty years ago a computer was as large as a room; now it can sit on a child's lap (if it wants to). Sometime soon I suspect we'll have a stamp-sized computer used by Lilliputians. "Think small" will be our motto. I'm taking shrinking lessons now.*

[Expands discussion, providing historical perspectives into the past and future.]

Prewriting Strategies

Prewriting strategies include activities designed to generate criteria, reasons, and evidence.

Activities for Generating Criteria

Students need practice in generating criteria, in stating a claim (in the case of evaluation, a claim of judgment), and in building their arguments. Practice in these areas carries over into all of the argumentative writing types.

Criteria are standards for judging something. They apply to a class of things, not to individuals in the class. If, for example, students are to evaluate a fast-food restaurant, their criteria must be appropriate for fast-food restaurants, not for gourmet restaurants. For evaluations to seem informed and convincing, they must be based on appropriate criteria.

Criteria must be impersonal, not based merely on personal tastes, and they must be appropriate to the thing being evaluated. They should be chosen to point to the most basic and important features of the thing being evaluated.

1. You might have a topic on the board when class begins. Students, in five minutes, list criteria, generating as many as they can.

   Some suggested topics:

   - What makes an excellent pizza?
   - What qualities make a worthwhile, story-style, weekly TV program?
   - What qualities does an excellent teacher have? (Note: this can be a teacher of music, sports, and so forth.)
   - What qualities does an excellent parent have?
   - What makes a school assembly worthwhile?
   - What makes a good "read-for-pleasure" book?
   - What are the qualities of an effective punishment?
   - What are the qualities of a good friend?

   Note: Any of the above (with the possible exception of the pizza) can easily be linked to literature. For instance, "parent" and "teacher" work easily into a discussion of *To Kill a Mockingbird;* "friend" works easily with *A Separate Peace;* and "good book" works nicely with *Catcher*, where, early in the book Holden gives his own criteria for a good book.

   In the next few minutes, students choose the four of their criteria that they feel are most important to their evaluation of this item. Ask them to explain each of these criteria in three to four sentences.

2. Work with students to brainstorm some general criteria for different subjects, to help students build a generic bank of criteria. For example, criteria for an effective movie might include the following:

   - Story line
   - Theme
   - Unity and consistency
   - Character development
   - Acting
   - Cinematography
   - Direction

   You might then work with students to generate criteria specifically for an effective horror movie or an effective suspense movie. These criteria will be specific to the genre under discussion while building on the more general criteria established before.

Building the Argument: Generating Reasons and Evidence

Once the claim is made, writers must consider the reasons for that judgment. They must determine why they like or dislike the movie or senator or city or whatever they are evaluating. Then they must see what factual evidence they can offer to support these reasons. One way of doing this is to build a chart as illustrated on the next page.

One Student's Writing Process

This student's process in writing *Love at First Mini-Byte* is chronicled with drawing, first draft, and response from an editing partner.

Prewriting Activity – Advertisement of a Product or Service

Draw an ad for a product or service that you believe is the best of its type. The product may already exist or you may create your own. The ad should include a short slogan or succinct paragraph (see Figure 2).

State the judgment: LaVal's pizza is by far the best in the East Bay area.

Criteria	Reasons	Evidence
Cheese	Different kinds of cheese. Uses 6 oz. of cheese as opposed to 4 oz. used other places.	Saw pizza maker put on jack, mozzarella, and white cheddar. Spoke to manager who confirmed amount.
Crust	Crust is thick but doesn't overshadow the toppings.	Have ordered this 3 times during this month, and each time crust is consistent.
Price	Price is higher than other, but you get more for your money in both toppings and taste.	LaVal's large is $15, while others run about $13. LaVal's gives 4 oz. of each topping while other places use 2 or 3 oz.

An Evaluation Essay

Write an article for a consumer magazine evaluating your choice of product. Your article should convince your reader of the advantages or benefits of your product or service by establishing evaluative criteria and providing evidence of its worth.

Writing: First draft, article for a consumer magazine

In this post-transistor, microchip world, small is beautiful and portable is progress. In the movie Peggy Sue Got Married, Peggy Sue, the 1950's teen queen, has the ability to see into the future; she predicts that "In the future, everything gets smaller, except portable radios." Twenty years ago a computer was as large as a room; now it can sit on a child's lap (if it should want to). Sometime soon we'll have a stamp-sized computer run by Lilliputians. And I'll want one—the microcomputer, not the Lilliputian. I own a personal computer, and it serves me well. But it is not portable. Unless you call transporting a computer in my car "portable." A few years ago "portable" computers came into being. They resemble small movie projectors, and well-muscled business executives lug them around. Then along came the Z-181 and its pals, so-called "laptop" computers. These elfin wonders with one-fifth the size, but more than twice the memory of their desktop cousins of a year ago have another advantage: they're cute. I can pat its casings in thanks, clutch it to my chest, swing it with careless abandon. It's my friend, my compatriot, my partner. More than a personal computer, it's as individual as my toothbrush, as intimate as deodorant.

But more computer-wise types are convinced by data. Here comes some, straight from the user's manual: 640K memory; two 3.5-inch disk drives, each with capacity of 720K—twice the storage of a normal PC; running speed of 4.77 megahertz; interfaces with external 5.25 disk drive; fully MS-DOS compatible; AC converter/recharger; weight—a bit over eleven lbs.; cost—$2000, a price tag only the son of the generous president of a computer company can afford. But, in time, the price should diminish. I prefer the Z-181 over its competitors for several reasons. Primo, my generous father, president of a computer company, gave it to me. Segundo: the luminescent, easy-on-the-eyes screen. Most laptops have screen displays of liquid crystal, like that of a calculator's, visible only in bright light. The Z-181 glows legibly even in near-dark. It's because of

Fig. 2. A student's ad

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something called a "backlit supertwisted birefringent screen," which sounds like two tortured Amanas to me. Whatever it is, it makes for easy viewing. Additionally, the Z-181 does not suffer from the malady of many laptops: squashed screen displays producing the fun-house mirror effect of stunted, squat shapes. Like shoving Kareem Abdul Jabar into a Hyundai. The Z-181 screen produces the same proportions as my desktop PC, so the only distortions of reality are in my mind, not on the screen.

Student Response

The writer met with his response partner. A portion of their recorded conversation is transcribed here. "R" is the responder; "W" the writer. A revision guide follows the dialogue.

R: You are so clever, so clever, and you know it too.
W: Thank you, thank you. You're so right.
R: How long did it take you to do this?
W: About two hours, not counting the drawing. 'Course all the statistics came right out of the manual. I had a hard time getting started 'til I hooked onto the "Peggy Sue Got Married" idea. I don't think it works too well as an intro. There's too much of a gap between the intro and the next paragraph. But it's all I've got; it's all I could think of.
R: Yeah, yeah. But it does bring up the idea of size. I like the Lilliputians part, you show off. Show the teacher you remember last year's reading.
W: (laughter) *Yeah. But the picture of little elves typing on tiny-tiny keyboards with their teeny-teeny fingers with their eentsy-weentsy fingernails . . .* (laughter).
R: . . . really breaks you up, doesn't it? (laughter) *I'm not saying get rid of it. I like all this stuff. But it's too general, relating it to the movie and all. Maybe because you're talking about the future, you know, future visions, you could use it as a conclusion: Because really, you don't have a conclusion, right? Except this bit about your distorted mind, which is true, but not your point.*
W: Hey, good. Now I've got a conclusion, but no intro. I can't start the essay with paragraph two. It's too blunt, an already-into-it paragraph. I need some lead in.
R: Well, that's your problem. Work on it, boy.
W: Who you callin' boy, girl? (laughter)
R: OK., now, boy, back to this here paragraph . . . I don't understand why you're complaining about your computer not being portable. If you wanted a portable computer, you should have bought one.
W: "Portable" is the wrong word . . . movable, transportable . . . O.K. I'll change it to something else.
R: I really like this part about it being cute, like you're attracted to it—a love affair type thing . . . your "friend," your "partner," but "compatriot" doesn't fit with the love. It's too political sounding. And "intimate as deodorant" is yuck. Perfume is intimate; your toothbrush is intimate in the sense that you won't let anybody else use it, but deodorant reminds me of sweat and athlete's foot.
W: Well, we all need to be reminded of athlete's foot once in a while, and sweat, well, we all do it.
R: Oh, come on. Men sweat; women perspire. That's 'cause we're so intimate. (giggle)
W: You like that intimacy angle, don't you?
R: Yeah, but you should play it up more. You know, your love affair with the computer. Your style is so breezy and kind of informal anyway. The love stuff would make it even funnier . . . One thing I really like about your writing. Only you could take a boring topic like computers and make it almost enjoyable to read. It's your style, your sense of humor. Here you need more reasons, more arguments. You only give two—your dad bought it for you and the nice screen. She (the teacher) will ding you if you don't have more reasons. That's the trouble with my paper. It's all reasons. Too heavy on facts, no context, no style. It sounds real dry.
W: You know what kind of helped me with the style for my essay? The drawing. I really liked doing the drawing. Once I did the drawing, with the elf and all, I realized that the whole idea of minicomputers was kind of funny, cute . . . . What's your drawing?
R: It's this picture of John Updike. My ad is for his argyle socks. It's about how all his creativity comes from his socks, his argyles. "Argyle: the socks to write in and about and from" is my slogan.
W: That's a pretty funny idea.
R: Yeah, but the whole thing is kind of too serious . . . .

(The discussion then switches to the other student's essay.)

Revision Guide

This revision guide, while in no way intended to supplant the conversation transcribed above, does serve to remind the writer of points covered in the discussion, including:

What is the product or service?
Laptop computers

Intended audience:
Adult—not necessarily computer types

Description of style:
In places breezy, light, amusing; other places statistical, factual

What is the writer's judgment of the product or service?
Likes laptop computers, the Z-181 in particular

What criteria/standards of judgment does the writer use in the promotional copy?
Portability
Cuteness, intimacy
Technical capacity
Advantages of Z-181
- *It was a gift.*
- *Screen display*
- *No distorted images*

+ = Advice for additions (indicated on paper)

– = Suggested omissions or changes (indicated on paper)

Suggestions to improve the promotional copy:
Needs a conclusion
Focus more on intimacy, love affair; maybe change intro; use intro as conclusion and write new intro on love affair.
Descriptions need more flair, personal detail.

Response and Revision

Writers may find the following questions helpful as they discuss their drafts with partners or groups:

Audience's knowledge of the subject
- How much knowledge of the subject does the reader have?
- What kinds of information will I need to supply so that the reader will accept my evaluation?

Criteria
- Are my criteria appropriate to the subject I am evaluating?
- What further evidence do I need to strengthen my evaluation?

Organization
- How should I capture my reader's attention at the beginning of the composition?
- How can I sequence my reasons so that they effectively support my judgment?
- What is irrelevant or ineffective in my composition and could be deleted?
- How should I end my essay—by summarizing my reasons, by restating my judgment, or by using some other strategy?

Response strategies might include some of the following:

- Read students' essays aloud to the class.
- Put some essays on overhead transparencies to assist close analysis.
- Use published evaluations as models and have students analyze the strategies used.
- Have small groups of students read their essays aloud to each other and discuss them, using class-established criteria.
- Have students exchange papers and respond to each other in writing.

When reading each other's papers, students may need to focus on specific areas of evaluation writing to assist the writer during the revision process. Remind students that the order of items for response/revision is dependent on each writer's own organizational pattern. There is no set pattern for writing essays. Possible response guidelines for readers to use follow:

- State the subject of evaluation.
- State the writer's judgment of this subject and list the criteria used for his or her evaluation. Comment on the criteria used. (Is it appropriate to the subject? Does it cover the needs of the subject to be evaluated? Is it relevant to the evaluator?)
- Look at the writer's support for his or her judgment. Make a general statement about the effectiveness of the support. (Is it logical? Does it flow from one point to the next or does it seem choppy or disorganized? Do you need more to be convinced of the judgment given?)
- Comment on the lead or opening of the essay. (Does it capture your interest and make you want to read more? Is it intriguing?)
- Tell the writer which if any parts that you feel could be improved.

- Look at the ending of the essay. Comment on its effectiveness.
- Make an overall statement about the strengths of this paper.
- Suggest any further areas of improvements the writer might make in revising this paper.

Students' responses need to be thoughtful, helpful, and specific. The purpose of responding is to assist the writer during the revision process—to provide a frame for the writer to rethink or resee his or her essay. A workshop guide must not be seen by the writer as a list of instructions to be followed during the revision process. The writer needs to maintain ownership of his or her paper, selecting and discarding advice as he or she sees fit.

Classroom Writing Assignments

The classroom writing assignments that follow present a writing situation, possible prewriting activities, and suggestions for drafting the essay. Between the first draft and any subsequent drafts, students benefit from critiques of their essays by other students.

In making evaluation assignments you will want to keep the following possibilities in mind:

- Evaluations provide an occasion for serious consideration of the criteria on which judgments are based—the standards by which any class of events (oboe concerts) or objects (science fiction novels) may be judged. Since learning standards of judgment for many classes of things is central to students' education, you may want to spend quite a bit of time with students discussing, defining, and justifying criteria for a particular evaluation.
- A successful evaluation requires an analysis of the subject. When analyzing any subject, students have an advantage if they can revisit, resee, or reread the subject before and during drafting and before revising. Students must know a lot about a subject in order to amass the amount of concrete evidence required to support a judgment.
- Since evaluations are relative (made in relation to other subjects in the same class), they invite comparison and contrast. Encourage students to make use of this essential writers' strategy. Some evaluations can even be set up as contrasts. For example, a writer could decide which of two short stories is better and state why.
- Evaluations can be either positive or negative, but writers must make a firm judgment, asserting the value they place on their subjects, with no waffling. Judgments may be qualified, of course—writers may find some faults in movies they praise—but there should be no doubt about the writer's judgments.

Assignment: Evaluating Movies or TV Dramas. Evaluating a movie successfully presents a more challenging writing situation than most students will think initially. The secret to a successful movie evaluation is to be able to see the movie at least twice and preferably even more often. You may want to begin by renting a film or videotape of a classic film, recent film of quality, or short art film. Criteria could be discussed and the evaluation roughly planned after the first showing; and then students could take detailed notes, accumulating evidence to support their judgments, during a second showing. After first drafts and critiques by peers, students could watch the film still again before revising. Even though students are all writing about the same movie, their judgments may differ, and their arguments and evidence will certainly vary.

You could follow this introductory assignment with another in which students either choose their own movies or do more of the work individually on a different class movie. Students might also view two movies by the same director and then write an essay arguing that one is better.

Assignment: Evaluating Performances. Students can evaluate performances they can observe at least twice: art shows, concerts (some famous concerts are available on videotape), or comedians' performances (also available on videotape).

Assignment: Evaluating Groups, Teams, or Clubs. Students can write essays evaluating any group, team, or club they participate in or can observe closely. They may be tempted to propose solutions to problems in the group, but the teacher can help them keep their focus on evaluation. Comparison is often essential to success—comparing this year's water polo team to last year's, your third grade class to your fourth grade class, your present service or academic club to the one at your former school.

Assignment: Evaluating Literature. Students can write essays explaining why they especially liked (or disliked) a text (poem, story, novel, or play); arguing that one text is a particularly good example of its genre; or arguing that one text is better than another. These assignments require serious discussion of criteria for "good" texts.

Assignment: Evaluating Self. Students can evaluate themselves in a number of roles—as writers (How much better am I now than I was a year ago?); as members of a writing response or study group (How well does our group function? How successfully do I contribute to the group?); as learners (How well am I learning the material in my history class); as team members (How good is our team? How good is my personal contribution?); or as a citizen of the school (How am I contributing?). This assignment invites, or perhaps even requires, arguing first of all in the essay for the criteria for a good writer, history student, or baseball team member.

Assignment: Evaluating Other People. Students can write essays evaluating a person who has taught, counseled, coached, or supervised them—a boss at work, a swimming or dancing teacher, a sports team coach, a church youth leader, a club sponsor, or a teacher (you may want to limit them to teachers at other schools—their elementary or middle schools), a minister, or a counselor. Preclude immediate family members and personal friends. This assignment, like the previous one, invites writers to begin their essays by establishing their criteria for evaluating the person. It also invites comparison.

Students also can evaluate an author, an artist, a performer, or an athlete.

Assignment: Evaluating a Consumer Product. Students are a targeted audience for advertising today. Students can also be astute shoppers in the marketplace and are often curious about each other's tastes and preferences.

Have students choose a consumer product to evaluate. The products might range from an item they are presently planning to buy, such as a car, motorcycle, CD player, or a tennis racket, or an item they buy regularly—toothpaste, cereal, car wax, or tennis shoes.

After deciding on a product to evaluate, students need to choose the criteria that they will use to judge the product. The following sample chart might be useful for students as they think about the product.

Product Jeans				
BRANDS	Criteria	Workmanship	Style	Price
	Levis			
	Guess			

For students who may have a hard time developing the criteria, teachers might model the process on the board with the class using a particular product. Teachers also might have students work in pairs or in small groups helping each other think through possible criteria.

After students have gathered information, the next chart could be used to summarize the information.

	Plus	Minus	Other
BRAND A			
BRAND B			

Students can write a first draft of an essay presenting their judgments and their support of their judgments. Remind students that they can praise or damn their subjects. In small groups they can share their drafts, checking for the clarity of their thinking and the persuasiveness of their evidence.

After sharing their essays and revising their drafts, students can write a final draft. At this point students will want to proofread and edit their drafts carefully.

Additional Exemplary Student Essays

A high school student wrote this movie review for the school newspaper. The writer offers a judgment, provides ample evidence for his judgment by citing specific incidents and details, and concludes crisply.

Mel Gets Madder Than Max in New Thriller Cops and Robbers

Movies have prospered for 84 years on that theme. In fact, one of the first classic films, The Great Train Robbery, *involved cops and robbers. But until* Dirty Harry *these films never received any really serious consideration that epics like* Gone With the Wind *received. Times change, and what has evolved this year is perhaps one of the greatest cops and robbers movies of all time.*

Lethal Weapon, *starring Mel Gibson (*Mad Max*) and Danny Glover (he's the cowboy in* Silverado *who spoke the classic line when faced with bad guys, "I don't wanna shoot you and you don't want to be dead"), takes the best from the last twenty years' worth of cops and robbers films and churns out a fast-paced, action-packed, mile-a-minute motion picture. Oh yeah, it's exciting, too. Like most police films, the plot is pretty simple. But there are enough twists and full-long turn-abouts thrown into the works to keep the audience on the edges of their seats.*

Glover is a veteran plain-clothes police detective who just turned 50. At his age, the last thing he expected from his job was adventure, but sure enough, he gets it in the form of Martin Riggs (Gibson), his new partner.

Glover is investigating the death of a wealthy banker's daughter. The banker (Tom Atkins of countless John Carpenter films) also happens to be an old army buddy from Viet Nam.

The investigation leads Glover and Gibson into a giant crime-world where guerrilla-assassination techniques are used for drug-dealing and other vices of the nasty sort.

The lines are well-drawn, with the cops on one side, and the robbers on the other. Glover sees that he's in over his head on this case, but that's only until he sees his partner in action.

Gibson, returning to the movie screen after a 20-month hiatus following Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome, *delivers his most awesome non-Max performance yet.*

On his first assignment with Glover, he attempts to bring a man (who is trying to kill himself) down off of a building. "I'll bring him down," he says casually.

On the roof, he converses with the hyperactive jumper. When he gains the jumper's trust, he quickly handcuffs himself to him. Then he steps off the building, taking the jumper, who by now is having second thoughts, with him to where there may or may not be an air bag on the ground to catch them.

Gibson puts an eerie, yet lovable personality into Riggs, one in which the audience feels that Yes, this man is crazier than Don Rickles, and Yes, he jumps off buildings and Yes, he shoots happy face patterns into targets at shooting ranges, but he must be okey-dokey because he blows away the bad guys.

But he is equally matched—well, almost equally matched—with the top bad guy's #1 henchman, played with a flourish by Gary Busey.

Busey, in his first villain role, if you don't count a role as a crazed radio-reverend on one of the HBO's "Hitchhiker" episodes, nearly steals the film from Gibson as the albino Mr. Joshua.

And with a tight and thrilling script written by Shane Black, a Sunny Hills graduate, Lethal Weapon, *makes for a thrilling two hours, and it is as well worth $5.50 as any other quality film.*

But what makes this different than any other cops and robbers movie? Not a lot, but enough.

Gibson is a lone wolf cop, who's mistrusted by his peers and considered dangerous, just like Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson.

He's a Viet Nam special forces vet who uses his soldier skills as a cop, just like Sylvester Stallone and Chuck Norris.

What makes it different?

The answer is that Mel Gibson is a far better actor than Stallone, Bronson, and Norris. And watch out Clint, or Carmel might just have a new mayor before you know it.

Given an opportunity to evaluate her best teacher or most valuable class, the following writer chose to write about her grandfather, a professor. With the economical brush strokes poetry demands, she paints a deeply personal picture of her best teacher, coloring her judgment with reasons, transforming an evaluation into a tribute.

Valuing My Professor

The shadow of your aging head
has loitered often near these words,
neat pencilled notes still track the places
where your mind once squirrelled for its
ecstasies.

A taste for excellence was what you sowed,
as often in the garden with the weight

of years upon you, eyes half-closed
and Dante slipped to your knee,
you'd wake and read aloud to me,
and words would come among my thoughts
as though my understanding danced at last
to their unrivalled leading.
At times the bronze chrysanthemums
would loll and stagger in the autumn heat
until your trembling hands
formed splints to bear their ragged heads.

And when we listened to a song-thrush in
your trees
it tore great frenzies from a throat
accustomed to more reticence,
or when you picked a rose, it was of all
most singular, supremely gold. A gift
to make small humble things unique,
to color and immortalize my world.

Guidelines for Writing Evaluation Prompts

Writing an evaluation requires a student to state a judgment based on appropriate criteria and to attempt to justify this judgment to particular readers. Because evaluation is a form of argument, the writer must establish criteria for the judgment of a subject, present the subject to readers, and use well chosen, plausible reasons to support that judgment. It is not appropriate to simply describe the subject, or to list "good points" or "bad points" without arguing for them. Evaluations are more than expressions of likes or dislikes. They are dependent not simply on personal preference but upon critical assessment of the subject based on criteria.

Writers may apply criteria traditionally associated with the subject or may rely on criteria developed through personal experience with or understanding of the subject. In order to make the evaluation convincing, the writer may support the argument with evidence and examples from the subject, personal experience, or comparison with related subjects.

There are two possibilities for framing the rhetorical situation of the prompt. In the first situation, the student is provided with a subject and asked to make a judgment about it: for example, "Read the following poem and decide whether you think it is a good or a bad poem." In the second situation, the student is provided the judgment and then asked to select the specific subject: for example, "Choose one place that you think is the best place to live, and explain why."

Following are guidelines for the writing situation and directions for writing for evaluation prompts. Suggested prompts model these guidelines.

Writing Situation

Identify a subject and describe it briefly in one to three sentences. The subject may be broad ("place to live") or quite specific ("a popular song"). So that students will have an adequate context for evaluation, ensure that they readily recognize the subject to be evaluated. Then, in a separate paragraph of two or three sentences, identify who is asking the student to write the essay (perhaps the student's English teacher) or the source where it will be published (perhaps the school newspaper) or who will read it (perhaps other students). For the first situation, ask the student to make a judgment about the subject, perhaps comparing it to other examples of its type. For the second situation, ask the student to recall a specific example of this subject as either a "best" or a "worst" example of its type.

Directions for Writing

Begin the directions, "Write an essay (an article, etc.) evaluating. . . ." Be sure the directions include these key terms: *evaluation*, *judgment*, *reasons*, and *argue* or *convince*. Invite students to include information or details from the subject in support of their reasons. You may want to remind them that readers may have a different opinion about their subjects, and that they must give reasons why readers should accept their judgment.

Mention again the reader or readers. The final sentence or two should include the words *convince* or *purpose* or both. Express the idea that students should convince their readers to "take your evaluation seriously," or to acknowledge that "you have thought carefully" about the subject.

Keep sentences relatively brief and vocabulary accessible. Title the prompt in a way that keeps students' focus on the writing situation.

Note: These guidelines should not constrain classroom writing assignments or student writing projects. Good classroom assignments and projects may share certain features of the state writing assessment prompts—purposefulness, specific readers, suggestions about strategies—but classroom assignments need not observe the

constraints on test prompts. These guidelines are designed solely to enable consultants to write prompts for the writing assessment.

Evaluating a Plan to House the Homeless

Writing Situation. A city has received money from the federal government to house the homeless people of the city. The city has come up with three plans to help the homeless, and the city has to decide which one it will support. In the first plan, the city would give the money directly to the homeless people, so they can rent a place to live. In the second plan the city would use the money to build shelters for homeless people. In the third plan the city would use the money to train homeless people so that they can get jobs and earn money to pay for their own housing.

Your social studies teacher has asked you to write an essay evaluating one of these plans that you think would be the best one. Think about the good points and bad points of each plan, and decide which one you think is best.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay evaluating one of the city's plans for the homeless. Choose only one plan. Give reasons for your judgment that it is the best plan, and support your reasons with evidence or examples. Try to convince your social studies teacher and the other students that your judgment is a sensible one.

Evaluating a Poem

Writing Situation. Your English teacher is asking the students in your class to collect poems for a book called "Best Poems for Young Adults." The poem on the next page is by (here would go name of author, nationality, and dates). Read the poem carefully and think about what qualities make a good poem. Decide whether you think this poem should be included in your class book, "Best Poems for young Adults."

Directions for Writing. Write an essay evaluating [name of poem]. Tell whether the poem should or should not be included in the collection of poems for young adults. Give reasons for your judgment and support your reasons with details from the poem itself. Try to convince your teacher and the other students that your judgment is a thoughtful one.

Essays Illustrating Rhetorical Effectiveness

High-range Achievement

The writer immediately enlists the interest of the reader in the opening sentence. The characteristics of the teacher and his booming voice are linked at once to the teacher's control and power. The last sentence of the paragraph continues the orientation by giving the teacher's name and teaching field.

The judgment is clear within the first paragraph, "power rooted in knowledge," and the statement, "Mr. Bettencourt also teaches a lesson in the art of teaching . . . ." Two criteria are present—Mr. Bettencourt's willingness to work hard as a way of getting students to work and his essential humanity in dealing with individual students.

The writer amasses large amounts of concrete evidence, and much of it is memorable for the reader. The reader sees Mr. Bettencourt "hold his arm up to the chalkboard day after day" and write the theorems "anew for each class." In support of the second criterion the reader sees him "adjust his countenance and tone of voice to the personality of the student to whom he is giving help." The contrast between "lecture days" and "work days" is especially effective. Readers are convinced that Mr. Bettencourt is an exceptionally effective teacher.

His voice reverberates throughout the room and echoes in the school corridors. The booming voice manifests control and power rooted in knowledge. In teaching the fundamental theories of calculus, Mr. Bettencourt also teaches a lesson in the art of teaching, in the ways of inspiring students to aspire everyday to the summit of their capabilities.

Mr. Bettencourt's class is necessarily simple in routine. His "reverberating" lecture voice is reserved for lecture days, days when he introduces and teaches new concepts to the students. Most often he writes theorems onto the board as the students copy them into their notebooks. He explains, slowly and concisely, the actual purport of these theorems and their applications. Believing that students comprehend more by writing theorems into their notebooks themselves, Mr. Bettencourt never distributes dittos or xerox copies. He realizes that, if he put forth the extra effort to write the theorems anew for each class, thereby forcing students to write the theorems themselves. The students will learn. Teaching is a two-way street. If the teacher works hard and is willing to hold his arm up to the chalkboard day after day, students are forced to work hard and, consequently, the

processes of learning and teaching are achieved. . . . the transfer of knowledge is alive.

"Work days" are days to digest all that has been written into those student notebooks. Students work quietly on assigned homework problems, and individuals with problems can ask Mr. Bettencourt for help. Thus, on lecture days, students are basically anonymous; they are muddled in one group of learners. On work days, students are allowed to pace themselves and to appeal for individual attention if needed. Work days, productive and without pressure, are quiet days of discovery in a student's path of learning.

Calculus is a course given in preparation for the Advanced Placement test administered nationally in May. Students are prone to frustration due to the stress and pressures brought about by the intensity of the coursework. Mr. Bettencourt realizes the enormous pressures that can push students to the brink of sanity. He injects humor in his lectures, interacts with students, and is virtually unafraid to try a new joke that may or may not draw laughs. He is amazingly almost chameleon when dealing with different students. On work days, he actually adjusts his countenance and tone of voice to the personality of the student to whom he is giving help. The student thus accepts and retains instruction from a person he/she trusts. In Mr. Bettencourt's class, the human element is never lost amidst the wordy theorems.

Mr. Bettencourt's booming voice owns the end of Lowell High's second floor corridor. His teaching reaches far beyond the school walls; it inspires the thinking of each of his students. And . . . thinking, the mind's exercise, has no boundaries.

Setting out to argue that one poem is better than another for a collection of poems for high school students—both poems were presented in the prompt—the writer of the next paper orients readers to the subject within the first paragraph. The writer's judgment sets up an essential contrast, which begins in the first paragraph, between Emily Dickinson's poem and its "counterpart." The evaluative judgment is made in the opening sentence. The criteria are clear. The poem has educational value as seen in its subtlety, in the rewards of discovery, in the choice of words that fit the poem's meaning, and in the value of rhyme as a feature that brings the poem closer in tone and rhythm to "what they [the seniors] are used to hearing." Because the writer amasses concrete and general evidence from the Dickinson poem, readers find the essay convincing.

The poem by Emily Dickinson is by far the best choice for Poems for High School Students. *This poem's images and message are not as obviously simple as its counterparts. Seniors, though they often like to take the easy way, do not appreciate being given patently simplistic things to read. The images in "Snake" are too easily seen, too physical to be enjoyed. Dickinson's poem is much more subtle, much deeper, and it is therefore more rewarding to discover its true theme. The images in her poem are derived from an observer's thoughts and reactions, and although some seniors may not think in the same way, most will understand what is being described.*

Dickinson's poem is also much more educational. With the single exception of "mottled" there is no other word in "Snake" to challenge a reader. Dickinson's poem contains a much wider use of the English language. This advanced vocabulary is used in interesting ways. The term "cordiality" in reference to snakes makes the reader examine closely the definitions of the word. The same is true for "transport" and "secure." True, Dickinson's poem takes a little work to be understood, but no one, least of all seniors, wish to have something handed to them on a silver platter.

Dickinson's poem also has something very important, rhyming verse. The final two sections of the poem are entirely rhyming verse. A book of poetry for seniors must contain poems that rhyme. The reason for this is simple. Seniors relate to rhyming poetry because it closely resembles popular music. The last eight lines of Dickinson's poem are comparable to song lyrics. Seniors appreciate poetry more when it rhymes, the poem being closer in tone and rhythm to what they are used to hearing.

As an educational poem or as a poem seniors can relate to, Dickinson's poem is by far the better choice. There will obviously be a great deal of in-depth discussion when this poem is read in class. In all areas, Dickinson's poem eclipses the other and it should definitely be included in the collection.

Stating the class to be evaluated right away, the writer of this next essay gives a background to the formulation of the class as a lead-in to the discussion of the course itself. She personalizes the writing with constant references to her specific experiences in this class and helps the reader to understand why it has been of so much value to her. Her criteria—the enthusiasm and knowledge of the teacher, the challenging and rewarding nature of the class, and the "particularly valuable" lab experience—are supported by firsthand experience laced with personal commentary. Her voice is strong, and she ties her closure into earlier doubts about the class that have turned into thankfulness that she has had the opportunity to be a part of this class—an unexpected twist of fate.

Last spring, when the time came to sign up for classes, I noticed a listing for A.P. Biology. I had enjoyed Academic Biology my sophomore year and was considering a career in genetic research, so I asked my counselor about the class. He said there never was such a class because there was never enough interest. Well, I knew I was interested and I knew of some other people who would be, so I drew up a petition and presented it to the principal. He was impressed and began searching for a teacher.

When I came back to school this fall, I learned that there were actually two A.P. Biology classes offered, one at first period and one at sixth. I was enrolled in the sixth period class and was a little upset to hear it would last twenty extra minutes every day, but glad to find out that we would not even have a sixth period after the test in May.

At first I was unsure about how good the class would be because I was unfamiliar with the teacher, but I soon learned that she was very enthusiastic and knowledgeable. On top of that, she had a degree in genetics, the area I was most interested in, and had attended a seminar over the summer on new and exciting lab experiments for high school biology classes. Things were looking up.

Despite my initial reservations, this year's A.P. Biology class has proven to be the most challenging and rewarding class I have ever taken. The other students in class are all very bright and have a genuine interest in learning. Because we are all well-behaved, the atmosphere is free and open, not constricted by rules and harsh discipline as most classes are.

The depth and range of subjects we cover in A.P. Biology is incredible. My mother is a nurse and my sister is training to be a doctor, but on many occasions I have told them of techniques and theories that they had never even been presented with. Although we have a great amount of material to learn, this class has given me more enjoyment than any other class ever has. I constantly challenge myself to learn and understand concepts above and beyond what is necessary for an "A."

The last aspect of this class that I feel makes it particularly valuable is the labs. We generally have two lab days a week and perform experiments that correspond with what we are learning in the textbook. We did one experiment involving genetic engineering, in which we "breeded" two strains of bacteria that were resistant to different drugs, and created a new strain resistant to both drugs. While studying respiration, we measured changes in the respiration rate of mice when subjected to cold and various other conditions. Right now we are studying the human nervous system and performed tests to discover reflexes we didn't even know we had. It is clear to me that experiments are a very necessary part of learning biology.

My experience in A.P. Biology this year has provided me with many things. It has shown me I have a true love of learning that I don't think I had previously discovered. It has also provided me with an intense interest in biology, which may very well affect my career goals. I am very thankful that I have had the opportunity to experience these things before going to college and I know that this class will always stand out as one of the greatest classes I have ever had.

Low-range Achievement

The next writer provides very little orientation for the reader. She does provide a judgment, but that judgment is followed by repetitive assertions about Caitlin Ryan's character traits. It is not clear whether these traits are criteria or evidence. The tone is plodding and recitational.

My favorite character is Caitlin Ryan. She was in the book series called Caitlin. I feel that she is my favorite character because she is admirable. It is someone that any girl would want to be like. She is rich and beautiful. Everyone admires her. She also is smart and tries to get what ever she wants.

Caitlin starts out as a rich, beautiful but selfish girl. No one loves her. At the end Caitlin turns out to be a loved and a very nice girl but how she lied to people and all through the book she made up for all the lies and people began to forgive her. She learned her lesson, and that was not to lie; and to always tell the truth about things because lies always catch up to you in the end.

Examples of Published Evaluations

Evaluations may be found in books, newspapers, magazines, and journals. The following evaluation is from Stanley Kauffman's book, *Living Images: Film Comment and Criticism.*

American Graffiti[1]

Everyone thinks his young years were fascinating, and everyone is right. For himself. But when artists use their young years as subject matter, which they frequently do, they have to prove that their young years can be fascinating to others. Broadly speaking, there are only two ways to do this: by showing that your young years were extraordinary or by finding depth and form that illuminate and preserve the commonplace.

The young American director George Lucas has tried for the latter. He has taken some familiar bull right by the horns and has wrestled it into a reasonably good film. A couple of years ago Lucas made a "future" film called *THX 1138* in which he lavished impressive cinematic skills on material so trite that he

[1] Stanley Kauffman, "American Graffiti," in *Living Images: Film Comment and Criticism.*

made me feel he had "an arrogance toward the need to have a fresh idea." This new script—by himself, Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck—still has no new ideas as such. But working close to what is apparently his own youthful experience, Lucas has so integrated methods and material that he finds some of the depth and form mentioned above; and, to some degree, he transforms the banalities of TV situation comedy into a small epiphany of a period.

American Graffiti, a tart, apt title, is a dusk-to-dawn picture. Its only resemblance to *La Notte!* It deals with four high-school buddies, and chiefly with two of them, in a California town in the early 1960s. At the beginning those two boys are presumably bound east for college together, one reluctantly, the other eagerly. By morning, the roles are reversed: the first boy leaves, the second stays with his hometown girl. The reasons for the changes, plus other plot strands involving friends and enemies, make up the story.

But the story is not the film--only its means of coming into being. (Which is what Lucas attempted, less successfully, in *THX 1138*.) The weakest parts are those that try to beef up the script, in plot and literary "theme" terms, like the mysterious blonde in a white T-bird who weaves symbolically through the film, taunting one of the boys. The young performers are all passable, but the pleasures of the picture are in the way it was made. There is no mere springboard of accurate milieu, as in *Summer of '42*, which got all its details right, then wallowed ahead into syrup: the milieu, so to speak, is this film, or what is best about it.

Lucas has picked a moving medium for a moving picture. Most of it—seemingly—takes place in and around cruising automobiles in the town streets. I saw this phenomenon in the mid-sixties when I spent a weekend in Grand Rapids, Michigan: boys and girls driving slowly up and down the main street all night, couples in cars or all-boy and all-girl cars honking at one another, sometimes conversing as they passed or stopped at lights, just flowing and cruising for hours. It was like the classical promenade of the European village, motorized.

This mobility is of course fit for film, and it's an easy figure of sexual exploration and of social rite of passage to maturity. From dusk to dawn, yet. But Lucas sees the automobile as the focus of other cultural implosions: the broadcast music of the time, the eating of the time (drive-ins, with waitresses on roller skates), even the hoodlumism of the time. When some not-so-juvenile delinquents want to scare one of the boys, what do they do? They take him for a ride!

So we see a group of late adolescents pinned to a target for cultural barrage. The drive-in food has funny names ("double Chubby Chuck") that seem to feed them as much as the food itself. They are followed everywhere by the voice of a disc jockey whom they adore. And of course there's the force of the movies themselves, who modeled the gang of hoods and the styles of kissing and romance.

As the picture floated and intertwined, it reminds me of Twyla Tharp's recent ballet *Deuce Coupe*—the phrase occurs in the dialogue—which used early sixties music from one of the same sources, the Beach Boys. The more it resembles ballet, the better *American Graffiti* is. The more it tries to delve into character and build climaxes (like an unbelievable prank on a police car), the thinner and more sitcom it gets.

Haskell Wexler, the accomplished cinematographer who was "visual consultant" on the film, saw the need for realistic abstraction. For instance an all-night stand called Mel's Drive-in is an oval neon temple with suggestions of the War Room in Dr. Strangelove. When *American Graffiti* concentrates like this, on *being* what it's about, it succeeds.

The following informative evaluation of the California Angels baseball team is from *The Bill James Baseball Abstract.*

California Angels[2]

By Bill James

The California Angels are the smartest baseball team I've ever seen. In the late seventies, when the Angels were trying to stop the Royals by firing free agents at them, they would patch together a lineup out of two or three free agents a year and a couple of rookies and some guy they could pick up in a trade who had flashy batting stats in Boston or some place, and when this "team" didn't win they would fire the manager. The Angels changed managers in midseason in 1974, 1976, 1977, and 1978. They also changed managers several times in the seventies between seasons. With each manager trying to "motivate" and guide a team assembled and instructed by somebody else, the Angels had no concept of executing fundamentals in a prearranged way. Since almost everyone on the team was either a free agent or a trade acquisition, there couldn't have been any "organizational" way of doing anything, so each player just did his own thing. Although they could hit and they had Nolan Ryan and Frank Tanana, each Angels game revealed a series of outfield collisions, dropped double play balls, basepath mixups, missed cutoff men, botched hit and run attempts, and pop-ups dropping in the middle of player triangles. When you bought a ticket to see the Angels play, you expected to see these things. It was so bad that even though I was a Royals fan and the Angels were the enemy and you wanted them to lose, it was irritating to watch a major-league team play this way. They were a team in name only, a team only in that they all

[2]Bill James, "Evaluation of the California Angels Baseball Team," in *The Bill James Baseball Abstract*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1988.

wore the same uniform and got credited for driving each other in.

As a sinner becomes a saint and a radical becomes a Reaganite, with the passage of time the Angels have struggled away from that pole and reached the other. The talent on the Angels now is much less impressive (*Sports Illustrated* keeps picking them to finish fifth), but less impressive only in the sense of not being able to run as fast or throw as hard. I've never seen a team, anywhere, anytime, execute so well. Do Boone, DeCinces, and Downing ever make mistakes? Reggie is a smart player. Grich is a smart player. They make very few mistakes and turn the double play extremely well. Even the young guys are smart players. Wally Joyner plays like he taught first base at Stanford. When was the last time you saw Dick Schofield cost his team a run? The 1986 Angels were a great tribute to a great manager.

The statistical evidence of this type of excellence is abundant and varied, and we'll get to that in a moment, but it's not just the stats. If you're ever in a mood to watch a game very carefully the Angels are the team to watch. They have all these plays they run—Bob Boone counts three and snaps the ball from a crouch to DeCinces, who is playing exactly as far off base as the runner is and beats him to the bag by a halfstep, which happens to be just when the ball is there. They line up two cutoff men so that the runner will watch the wrong one, and then when he thinks the throw has gone through they throw behind him. And they almost never throw the ball away while doing this.

They move runners. The Angels laid down 91 sacrifice bunts, eight fewer than in 1985 but still 35 more than any other American League team. They hit 61 sacrifice flies, eight more than any other American League team. They struck out only 860 times, fewest of any team in the division, with an exceptional 1.28-1 strikeout to walk ratio. The Angels scored 32.1% of their runners who were on base not counting home runs, the best percentage in the division. They scored 21 runs more than projected by the runs created method.

Though not a fast team, the Angels' 109 stolen bases were above the league average (105), and their stolen base percentage was an excellent 72.2%, best in the division. What Mauch's players say about him is that he never asks his players to do what they aren't capable of doing, and this is a classic case. Pettis and Schofield, the guys who are capable of stealing bases in a way that will help the team, will steal, and the rest of the team doesn't. Those two players had 91 stolen base attempts, and were successful over 80% of the time. The rest of the team attempted 60 stolen bases, and was successful 60% of the time.

The basis of any offense, however, is getting people on base. Whether you're going to grind the offense by speed, bunting, power, or whatever—and the Angels use all of them—it's not going to work if you don't have people on base. The Angels hit, as a team, just .255, seven points below the league average, yet they still had lots of people on base because they drew 671 walks, 26 more than any other major-league team. It was the highest walk total by any other major-league team since the Big Red Machine drew 681 in 1976. That gave the man excellent .338 team on-base percentage, third in the league. Then you consider that Angel pitchers walked only 478 men, and the Angels have a whopping 193-baserunner advantage just in the walks. The 478 walks was the lowest total in the division, helped by the fact that Mauch ordered only 19 intentional walks, the fewest of any major-league team. There would be very few teams that would be so weak in other areas that they could have 193 more men on base than their opponents and not post a winning record.

The Angels had little edges all around. They hit eight doubles more than their opponents (236-228), giving them an edge of about six runs. They hit four more triples than their opponents (36-32), giving them an edge of about four runs. They out-homered their opponents 167-153, giving them an edge of about 20 runs. They had nine more singles than their opponents, giving them an edge of about four runs. They stole bases not often but effectively, while Boone and the pitchers eliminated the opposition running game, giving them another 18-run advantage (Angel opponents survived only 55 of 116 stolen base attempts). They had 40 hit batsmen while their opponents had 27, giving them about four runs. They had 91 sacrifice bunts while their opponents had only 41, the advantage of which is extremely debatable, but the point is that they were not inferior to their opponents in any category, and they have all these little edges which add up to about 56 runs. Then you get to the real meat of the Angels' superiority to their opponents: They had 193 more base runners on walks, which means an extra 60-odd runs on the scoreboard, and the Angels are more than 100 runs better than their opponents. They did, in fact, outscore their opposition by 102 runs.

The Angels committed only 107 errors; their opponents committed 152. The Angels' pitchers threw 44 wild pitches, while their opponents committed 48. You can measure the same things in other ways. Given this broad base of superiority, you might expect the Angels to have no sharp splits in their record, and you would be mostly right. The California comments in the 1986 Abstract dealt with the success of Mauch's teams in one-run games. The reason for doing that study was that the 1985 Angels had a 30-13 record in one-run games. They continued to do well in that category in 1986, winning 29 of 45 one-run games (or 28 of 44, depending on what source you believe). The Angels were just 12-12 on artificial turf and did not do particularly well against left-handed pitchers, going 24-23 against lefties (.511) as opposed to 68-47 against right-handers (.591), but seem to have as many players who hit better against

lefties as the other way around. The Angels hit .259 against left-handers, only .253 against northpaws.

Like most of the other champions of 1986, the Angels faced no rugged competition. The Angels played sub-.500 ball (23-25) through May, but Texas and California pulled in front of the division in June. The Rangers dogged their heels in a somewhat menacing manner into September, but the Royals never could get anything going, and few people thought the Rangers would mount a charge. The Angels had the best record in the league after August 1. The biggest difference between the first half of the season and the second was that Ron Romanick (5-8, 5.50) was pitching in the first half and John Candelaria (10-2, 2.55) in the second. Donnie Moore, troubled with a sore shoulder, also had a 2.22 ERA the second half of the season after 4.95 the first half, restoring a shaky bullpen. Don Sutton, always a strong finisher, finished strong once again. Sutton looks like he intends to go 15-11 forever. The Angels' Most Valuable Player in 1986 was probably Mike Witt, one of the league's outstanding starting pitchers, and their biggest improvement from the year before was either at first base (Joyner was much better than Carew had been) or in the impressive development of Kirk McCaskill. Dividing the team into infield, outfield, starting rotation, and bullpen, the Angels' strongest element by far was the starting rotation of Witt, McCaskill, Sutton, Candelaria, one of the best in baseball. Like many classic teams, the Angels got little offense up the middle but superb defense. Catcher Boone, though pushing 40, looks 30 and is probably the best defensive catcher in the league. Gary Pettis, though he turns 29 in April, looks 17 and is the best defensive center fielder in anybody's league. The double play combination of Schofield and Grich was better offensively and not as brilliant defensively, yet both are fine defensive players and neither is a .300 hitter or anything.

The corner men in that scheme are counted on to provide the offense, and they did. First baseman Wally Joyner, third baseman Doug DeCinces, and left fielder Brian Downing were all excellent offensive players as well as capable defenders at the less demanding positions. The three players were almost equally valuable; it would be very hard to say who contributed the most. In right field and at DH the Angels had very productive combinations, meaning that they got either championship quality offense or championship quality defense out of every position. They had no real weaknesses except at times the bullpen.

For the last two years, the Angels have been a surprise team. In 1987 more will be expected of them, and it will be difficult for them to avoid slipping markedly. At this point who will and will not return is still being sorted out, although it seems clear that many of the Angels' veterans will be gone. On the one hand, I can see the need for this. There is an inevitable end clearly in sight for players such as Boone, Grich, Jackson, and Hendrick, and even Don Sutton probably can't really go on more than another decade or so. If the Angels bank on those players, they're going to be buying into a declining market, and they could well make the coming decline phase (or rebuilding period) much deeper and darker than it needs to be. On the other hand, I get the feeling that the Angels might not clearly understand how valuable some of the old, slow .240 hitters really are. I don't understand why the Angels don't seem to want to re-sign Ruppert Jones. Jones hit just .229, but he had a secondary average close to .400, and was one of the key reasons for the Angels' big edge in walks. Devon White will contribute in other ways, but I doubt that he will contribute as much. I do understand why the Angels are letting Reggie go, but between Reggie and Ruppert the Angels will be losing 156 walks, 35 homers, and 138 runs scored. Still, age is an indicator of probable decline. The Angels are old (their starting lineup averages 32.3) and are wise to start blending in some younger people.

If the Angels can win 85 or 88 games and stay in contention, they ought to consider that a good year. I think they'll drop, but with their superb starting pitching I don't think they'll drop a lot further than that. In this division, that means they should have a chance to win.

Two things—in this case, towns—started out the same way at the same time. Over the years they developed vast differences. What are the differences? How did they come about? What do they mean in our lives? In this look at Wilmington and New Castle, Delaware, Charles Kuralt tries to answer these questions.

Two Towns in Delaware[3]

by Charles Kuralt

NEW CASTLE, DELAWARE: During the first half of the seventeenth century, when the nations of Europe were squabbling over who owned the New World, the Dutch and the Swedes founded competing villages ten miles apart on the Delaware River. Not long afterward, the English took over both places and gave them new names, New Castle and Wilmington.

For a century and a half the two villages grew apace, but gradually Wilmington gained all the advantages. It was a little closer to Philadelphia, so when new textile mills opened, they opened in Wilmington, not in New Castle. There was plenty of water power from rivers and creeks at Wilmington, so when young Irénée DuPont chose a place for his gunpowder mill, it was Wilmington he chose, not New Castle. Wilmington became a town and then a city—

[3]Charles Kuralt, "Two Towns in Delaware" from *Dateline America*. New York: CBS, Inc. 1979. Permission by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

a rather important city, much the largest in Delaware. And New Castle, bypassed by the highways and waterways that made Wilmington prosperous? New Castle slumbered, ten miles south on the Delaware River. No two villages with such similar pasts could have gone such separate ways. And today no two places could be more different.

Wilmington, with its expressways and parking lots and all its other concrete ribbons and badges, is a tired old veteran of the industrial wars and wears a vacant stare. Block after city block where people used to live and shop is broken and empty.

New Castle never had to make way for progress and therefore never had any reason to tear down its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century houses. So they are still here, standing in tasteful rows under ancient elms around the original town green. New Castle is still an agreeable place to live. The pretty buildings of its quiet past make a serene setting for the lives of 4,800 people. New Castle may be America's loveliest town, but it is not an important town at all. Progress passed it by.

Poor New Castle.

Lucky Wilmington.

Recommended Readings

Reading and analyzing a variety of evaluations may help students become more astute writers of evaluation. Although many reviews have been collected into books—most notably those of movie critics, sportswriters, or social commentators—perhaps the most fruitful sources of current evaluation are magazines and newspapers. The following sampling of periodicals may supplement your classroom and school library.

Literary Cavalcade (Scholastic, Inc.)
Rolling Stone
Time Magazine
Newsweek
The New York Times Book Review
Psychology Today
Omni
Scientific American

Evaluation

Prompts for evaluation ask writers to make a judgment based on thoughtful examination of the worth of a subject. The task of writers of evaluation is to establish criteria for the judgment of a subject, to present the subject to readers, and to use well-chosen, plausible reasons to support that judgment. Most important, writers must provide enough evidence (details or examples) from the thing being evaluated for their evaluation to be convincing. Evaluations may take many forms. It may be an authoritative critique of a book, a literary selection, or dramatic performance; or it may be a personal endorsement or a negative review of a product or service.

Evaluations are more than expressions of likes or dislikes. They are dependent not simply on personal preference but on critical assessment of the subject based on criteria. Writers may apply criteria traditionally associated with the subject or may rely on criteria developed through personal experience with or an understanding of the subject.

While the *rhetorical* aspect of the assessment focuses on the distinctive features of writing types, the *effectiveness* aspect guides us to look carefully at the more comprehensive features of coherence and style. Coherence, a sense of organization, flow, and focus, is essential to all good writing. The coherent essay has a clear direction, each section flowing naturally from the preceding one. Coherence is demonstrated to readers through emphasis, organization, and repetition achieved through recurrences of language, syntax, and ideas. Style, for the purposes of this assessment, is observable in two written language features: (1) *sentence control* and (2) *word choice* or *diction*. In assessment of the effectiveness of style, the primary considerations are *appropriateness*, *precision*, and *control*.

Score Point 6 – Exceptional Achievement

Orienting Readers. The writer orients the reader by presenting the subject to be evaluated. Awareness of the reader invites a heightened interest in the subject and often influences the tone of the essay. To orient and accommodate the reader, the writer may:

- Describe the subject so that the reader can follow the evaluation of it.
- Establish criteria by informing the reader of criteria; assume the reader accepts criteria; or use criteria provided within the prompt.
- Describe personal experience or feelings associated with the subject.
- Address the reader's concerns and possible biases.
- Maintain a sense of the reader throughout the essay.

Judgment. Nearly always the writer's judgment will be stated explicitly, but it may be implied skillfully through context, tone, and word choice. The writer may acknowledge the complexity of the subject; however, the writer will make an assertion about the ultimate worth of what is being evaluated.

Criteria. The writer appraises the subject according to plausible standards that are applied consistently. The writer may use criteria traditionally associated with the subject (for example, price, mileage, maneuverability, and maintenance are often those used in evaluating an automobile) or may rely on criteria learned through personal understanding or awareness of the subject. The criteria, whether stated or assumed, are clear and insightful.

The criteria focus on significant qualities of the subject and establish the standards by which the subject is being judged. The standards may be presented explicitly or may evolve as the writer marshals evidence or reflects on the subject.

Evidence. The writer supports a judgment by effectively selecting and arranging pertinent evidence. In developing evidence, the writer may employ a wide range of strategies, such as the following:

- Use concrete, descriptive details from the subject.

- Provide examples from the subject.
- Cite lines from the text of a poem, story, play, movie, or song.
- Analyze the subject.
- Make insightful distinctions among different features of the subject.
- Weigh strengths and weaknesses of the subject.
- Compare and contrast the subject with other subjects in the same category.
- Bring in personal experience with the subject.
- Use testimonials from others who know the subject.

The presentation of the evidence is organized and readable. Each section of the essay is developed coherently. Language is precise and appropriate. The writer exhibits an exceptional control of sentence structures, maintaining the connections between ideas.

Score Point 5 – Commendable Achievement

Orienting Readers. The writer orients the reader to the subject. The writer may not accommodate the reader as skillfully as in a six-point essay.

Judgment. The writer states or skillfully implies a judgment about the subject.

Criteria. Whether stated or implied, criteria are clear and significant but may lack the insight of a six-point essay.

Evidence. The writer selects and arranges evidence logically, but not as convincingly as in a six-point essay. The writer may use a narrower range of strategies.

Each section of the essay is well organized; however, the connections between sections or within a given section may lack the smoothness of the six-point essay. A five-point essay shows the writer's ability to use words appropriately. Word choice may show less versatility than in the six-point essay; however, the diction is still strong and controlled throughout the essay. The writer exhibits sustained control of a variety of sentence structures.

Score Point 4 – Adequate Achievement

Orienting Readers. The writer orients the reader to the subject. The writer may acknowledge the reader at the beginning and end but may not be as aware of the reader throughout the essay.

Judgment. The writer expresses a firm judgment of the subject, usually stated clearly and explicitly.

Criteria. Criteria are appropriate to the subject but may be less significant.

Evidence. The writer gives reasons to support the judgment, and at least one reason is moderately developed. The reasoning may not be as insightful as in a five- or six-point essay, and though believable, the thinking may be predictable. The sections of the essay are adequately organized, although some details may seem extraneous, interrupting the forward movement of the essay.

Although the language in the four-point essay is generally appropriate, it may be somewhat conventional and prosaic. The writer may expend a disproportionate amount of time in description or summary, and there may be some gaps between sentences. The essay shows a sustained control of sentence structure, but it may have less variety than does the five- or six-point essay.

Score Point 3 – Some Evidence of Achievement

Orienting Readers. The writer provides weak or minimal orientation to the subject. Accommodation of the reader may be brief and perfunctory.

Judgment. The writer expresses a judgment.

Criteria. Criteria may be evident but general.

Evidence. The writer may give a reason or reasons in support of the judgment, but the reasons may be brief and unsupported. The writer may simply list reasons, or may attempt to develop a reason, but does so without coherence or logical connections.

Although the reader can understand the major ideas, there may be irrelevant details, digressions, and/or repetitions that hamper the forward movement. The writer shows basic control of simple sentences, but the three-point essay will have little sentence variety. Evidence may be shallow and/or confusing, and the writer may rely heavily on summary. The word choice is usually appropriate to the content; however, the writer may rely on general rather than specific language.

Score Point 2 – Limited Evidence of Achievement

Orienting Readers. The writer provides little or no orientation to the reader.

Judgment. The writer expresses a judgment, but the statement of judgment may not be clear or focused.

Criteria. The criteria may not be appropriate or discernible, or if discernible may not be appropriate.

Evidence. The writer may not give reasons for the judgment, but may simply summarize or describe the subject. Support, if given, may be vague, irrelevant, or illogical. The overall structure of the essay is weak. The writer exhibits little control of sentence structure, and the word choice is limited, relying on simple, imprecise words. Some words may be inappropriate or inappropriately used.

Score Point 1 – Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Orienting Readers. The writer may not acknowledge the reader.

Judgment. The writer usually mentions a judgment. Sometimes the writer may not state or imply a judgment but only briefly describe the subject.

Criteria. The criteria may be missing.

Evidence. The writer may give no support. Brevity and confusion are characteristics of a one-point essay.

Unscorable – Inappropriate Response

Off topic. No response. Written in a foreign language.

High School Writing Guide

Interpretation

Interpretation as a kind of writing has a long history. It is a basic human impulse to take a text, an event, or a phenomenon and try to explain its meaning in one's own words. Beyond enhancing self-knowledge, interpretation conveys one's insights to another. To make that leap in writing, from one mind to another, a writer must name the subject to be interpreted and provide a context for interpretation. The writer must then make claims about his or her understanding of the subject and provide some kind of support for those claims.

Since interpretation is central to many thinking behaviors, interpretive writing has much in common with other types of writing. From *autobiographical incident*, students bring narrative examples with specific, telling details to elaborate the claims of interpretation. From *evaluation*, they bring the ability to develop criteria and present evidence; from *speculation* and *controversial issue*, they bring the ability to provide strong rationales for one's position; and from *reflection*, the awareness of the importance of spinning an idea out, moving from the personal to the general. These strategies central to other kinds of writing become ancillary in the interpretive essay where the primary objective is to construct meaning from a text, an event, or a person's behavior.

Importance

Interpretation is built into the fabric of our thinking, ranging as it does from the inferences drawn from commonplace events to elaborate analyses of scientific or sociological data. When we hear bells ringing at school, we know that class is about to begin or end; when we hear fingers tapping on a desk, we infer nervousness or boredom. Such inferences, many of which are culturally based, are practically automatic, yet they govern our response behavior. On a more conscious level, however, we depend on interpretation to make important decisions.When we rely on a doctor to read and interpret an X-ray, we are depending on the accuracy of that interpretation to determine whether we have a fracture or a serious sprain.

High school and college teachers ask students to interpret whenever they ask them to determine the meaning of a scientific experiment, a work of art, or a historical event. In interpretive writing, students are intellectually challenged to examine how the ideas they read about in books, the ideas presented to them in newspapers or through works of art, fit into their knowledge system.

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When interpreting a piece of literature, students may support their positions with personal experiences as well as textual evidence. By analyzing a work through interpretive writing, students substantiate their own understanding of that work and convey their insights to others.

Characteristics of Interpretation

Theories regarding the teaching of textual interpretation have undergone major changes in the last decade or two, even since many present-day English teachers obtained degrees in literature. The *English–Language Arts Framework* reflects these changes in promoting the point of view that a reader constructs meaning or comes to an interpretation from personal transactions with a text rather than from discovering the "correct" meaning that lies hidden within the words on the page.

Writers of interpretive essays, then, must make claims about their own understanding of the meaning of an event, a phenomenon, or a work of literature or art and support these claims. While different writers may make different claims about the same subject, the effectiveness of the interpretation depends largely on the strength and convincing presentation of the supporting claims.

The following characteristics are common to all interpretive essays: point of departure, interpretive claims, support, and stance.

Point of Departure

To focus the interpretation effectively, the writer initially establishes a *point of departure* for the essay. The writer introduces the subject, forecasts the essay's intent, and provides adequate context for the reader. Although the amount of contextual background varies, depending on the writer's assessment of the intended reader, context does not ever dominate the essay.

Interpretive Claims

Within the framework of the context provided, the writer presents and develops *interpretive claims*, which, together with their support, create the central focus of the essay.

Support

The writer's task throughout the essay is to provide *support* in arguing for these claims by introducing personal experience, prior knowledge, related readings, and textual evidence, often including direct quotations. Support for the interpretive claims provides the bulk of most interpretive essays.

Stance

To persuade readers that the interpretation is reasonable and valid, the writer takes a strong, consistent stance and maintains it. The organization of the essay helps the reader perceive the writer's position.

Note: During the process of interpreting a text, a reader often develops new insights about the meaning of the subject. In a first draft interpretive essay, the reader/writer may discover that his or her original claims are no longer valid. These changes will help determine the course of subsequent revisions, but an early draft should not be criticized for failure to maintain a steady position on interpretive claims.

Exemplary Student Essay

The Creators
by Ly Tong

Two different identities from separate worlds—George, from Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? *and Martin, from Jack London's* Martin Eden*—are united by a common characteristic; they are both drivers boxed in the same model of car on parallel roads. A model which is fueled by words; words which could create images and evoke feelings, but were never recognized for their true values. George and Martin were both aspiring writers trapped in a desire to create stories. They led similar lifestyles, but were different in heart. This difference in heart forced their roads to branch off into separate avenues.*

[Clear point of departure and suggestions that student will discuss similarities and differences between George and Martin.]

George and Martin were both drunken drivers. They would drink to clear their minds. George used liquor to wipe out his miseries. " . . . we [George and Martha] cry, and we take our tears, and we put 'em in the ice box, in the goddam ice trays until they're all frozen and then we put them . . . in our . . . drinks" (p.86). Martin chose to drink to relieve himself of the tension he received from having to work in a laundry room all week long and from reading a disappointing letter from Ruth. "If he had had the energy, he would have refused to consider the lie, because he wanted to

forget. He started for the village slowly and casually, increasing his pace in spite of himself as he neared the saloon" (p.142). So with liquor they found a temporary peace. But even with these sporadic intervals of engulfing themselves in a world outside of their own, Martin and George both understood the nature of the world they lived in.

[Good metaphor employed to explain first similarity or first interpretive claim. This metaphor continues throughout paper. Student uses quotations from the text to illustrate the ideas exemplified in George and Martin.]

They both knew the world was illusionary. George may not have known the difference between truth and illusion, but he knew that they both existed in this world, and how to use illusions in his life. In response to Martha's inquiry, "Truth and illusion, George; you don't know the difference" (p.94), George said, "No; but we must carry on as though we did." And so he did. George created a son from his imagination. George also wrote his only book, thinking that the story he created really happened. "No, Sir, this isn't a novel at all . . . this is the truth . . ." (p.65). Martin thought that his effort to enlighten himself with book knowledge and writing would give him fame, which would in turn give him happiness all wrapped up in a little bundle called Ruth. Fame, he received; Ruth, he also won—but happiness he did not. So even "he would forget the books he had opened and the world that had proved an illusion" (p.328).

[The next interpretive claim is quite clear. Both characters "knew the world was illusionary." Good quotations used to break up reasons.]

Before Martin came to want to "forget" books, he loved to create them. ". . . the miserable story got away with me. I couldn't help writing it. It demanded to be written" (p.273), Martin said, expressing his feelings about his story Wiki-Wiki. This desire to create was not only an obsession that possessed Martin, but George too. The games he played with Martha and his guests, the son he created and killed, and the book he wrote were brought to life by his want—his need—to create.

[Student now uses another similarity of the characters—their need to create.]

On their roads to create and to write they both encountered the same obstacles; the people they cared for lacked faith in their writing talent. These same people thought that they were derelicts, and would never be successful. In response to George's first book, "Daddy said . . . Look here, kid, you don't think for a second I'm going to let you publish this crap, do you?" George's father-in-law and his wife, Martha, mocked him for trying to write a book. Martha growled at George, "I watched the younger men around you, the men who were going to go somewhere. And I sat there and watched you, and you weren't there!" George was so discouraged that he never wrote another book to be published again. Martin was, in contrast to George, a prolific writer. But even with his many written works finished, the people he cared for did not believe that any of his works had enough substance that they would sell. They kept insisting to Martin that the reason magazine editors rejected his works was that they were not any good. Ruth, his fiancee, once told Martin, "Why, your good work, what you yourself call good, you can't sell. You have tried—you know that—but the editors won't buy it" (p.174). His friends and relatives pleaded with him to give up this notion of writing. "Don't you think it's about time you got a job?" (p.253) were words Martin often heard. They did not think that writing was a "real" job. The strong heart of Martin that helped him persevere, and the weak heart of George which made him quit writing, is where the contrast between Martin and George starts. From here they split into separate paths.

[Convincingly develops and illustrates the reason with solid evidence. Again the image of the road or "path" is used to tie in with earlier metaphor.]

Their personalities differ. They are both faced with times that are difficult to remain calm, and while George would become excited, (AND I HAVE KILLED HIM!" (p.109) he screamed at Martha once), Martin stays tranquil. Martin is apathetic to his new found wealth and fame. "He thought of the wild delight that should have been his had this happened a few short months before, and he contrasted that delight that should have been with his present uncaring coldness" (p.377).

[Now the differences are important as the student moves away from similarities.]

The disparity in their personality is also seen in the way they treat others. George is vengeful. When people inflict pain on him, he hurts them back. After being mocked by Martha for writing a book George says, "Let's see now . . . what else can we do? There are other games. How about . . . how about . . . Hump the Hostess?" (p.66) in his attempt to gain revenge. Or if a person makes a mistake George would force that person to repent. The reason he kills his son is to punish Martha for breaking their pledge to keep their son a secret. "You mentioned him . . . you mentioned him to someone else" (p.109). In contrast, Martin is sympathetic to everybody, even to those who did not have faith in him. When Mr. Morse, the father of Ruth who insisted that Ruth break the engagement with Martin, invited Martin to dinner, "Martin was not angry. He was not even on his dignity. He tolerated Mr. Morse . . . He did not decline the invitation" (p.347). For his family, Maria, and Joe, Martin gives financial assistance. As for

Ruth, when she came back to him after he receives prominence, Martin was not condescending, bitter, or malicious to her. "And in his large, easy way, desirous of not inflicting the most grievous hurt a woman could receive, he folded his arms around her and held her close" (p.361). At one point, during his last discussion with Ruth, Martin even felt some sympathy for her. "For the first time his arms folded her gently and with sympathy . . ." (p.366). Martin realized that it was not Ruth's fault for rejecting him; the fault lay in her society, her bourgeois upbringing.

[Personality is the first difference discussed. Good quotations used to develop claim.]

Throughout Martin's life, Martin had been kind to others. This does not mean that he was naive to other people's way of thinking. George and he both see that the world is an illusion, but George plays along with the world, while Martin never escapes reality. In their writings, George cannot discern between reality and illusion, whereas Martin can depict what is his creation and what is tangible. George admitted to his confusion between truth and illusion. He is not ashamed of it. He even told Honey, a guest, that if at times he doesn't like the present, he would revert to the past. "When people can't abide things as they are . . . they do one of two things . . . either they turn to a contemplation of the past, as I have done, or they set about to . . . alter their future" (p.84). In this way of jumping from past, to present, and to future, George avoids reality. Instead of avoiding reality, Martin faced it. He thought about his fame, about who he was, and what he stood for all the time. "He drove along the path of relentless logic to the conclusion that he was nobody, nothing. Martin Eden, the hoodlum, and Martin, the sailor, had been real, had been he; but Martin Eden, the famous writer, was a vapor . . . it couldn't fool him" (p.357). All the works that were selling rapidly now that he was famous were works performed; he had already written them. Martin Eden knew that he was sick, sick of life. "Something has gone out of me. I have never dreamed of being sated with life. Life has so filled me that I am empty of any desire for anything" (p.367). Knowing that he had no more to live for Martin Eden committed suicide. No, it was not to escape reality, but because he had too much of it. It is ironic that the one who chose to live in a tangible place, George, is the one who is not wholly in it.

[Martin never escapes reality; George does. Uses passage from *Martin Eden* to continue use and consistency of metaphor. Ironic statement explained.]

So the two cars take different directions at a fork in the road. One heads north to the stars with a driver who is watching the road carefully; the other becomes lost in a curvy road, with a driver aimlessly driving about.

[Good bringing together of metaphor at end of paper.]

One Student's Writing Process

Prewriting

Martin Eden:

1. *Throughout the novel Martin strives to become rich to be able to be worthy of Ruth who he believed at first he loved dearly. He is a striving writer who nobody has faith in.*
   - a) *Possessed a different type of knowledge at first (p.26), one of life through experience.*
   - b) *Wanted top change to be like Ruth's class (p.33), grammer (p.69).*
   - c) *Generous at the beginning to end (p.35).*
   - d) *Kind nature in the beginning (p.44).*
   - e) *Avid interest in books (p.49).*
   - f) *Untamed (p.63); different from the men in Ruth's circle (p.249).*
   - g) *Like a dog to Ruth (p.83).*
   - h) *Awkward speech habit of not being able to say the right words (p.112).*
   - i) *Would not quit on his writing (p.121, 123, 253).*
   - j) *Martin Eden was an animal Ruth wanted to tame (p.151, 191).*
   - k) *Determined; scarcely any sleep.*
   - l) *Did not have faith in Martin (p.153), mother/daughter talk.*
   - m) *Did not comprehend love (p.156).*
2. *Realizing the simple-minded bourgeos (p.185, 225).*
   - a) *Starting to speak his mind against the establishment (p.186).*
   - b) *Music, strong (p.264).*
   - c) *World is an illusion (p.328).*
   - d) *Changed, still faithful to love, but not as easy-going (p.333).*
   - e) *Revengeful on magazines, but not on the people he had once cared about (p.343); mags (p.347); apathetic.*
   - f) *Work performed (p.348)*
   - g) *Wanted 2 b recognized for himself (p.348); why he like the lower class more (p.362).*
   - h) *Feeding Martin (p.353).*
   - i) *Martin Eden the famous writer did not exist (p.357).*
   - j) *Ruth back, no feeling towards her (p.361).*
   - k) *Faces that he is sick (p.366).*

George's characteristics:

He is currently married to Martha who he likes sometimes. His way of showing his emotions for Martha is different from the typical love seen in novels. He likes her because she understands his nature more than anyone else. They play tricks on each other. He is somewhat an illusionary. He is younger than Martha but they seem to be on the same level of thought. George is a writer. He wrote about how a child killed his parents. In his second book he said he wrote about how the child laughed at this.

- *a) Martha's daddy did not like him (p.43).*
- *b) "i am very mistrustful" (p.20).*
- *c) Doesn't want order in the world (p.34).*
- *d) George the writer (p.63. 64).*
- *e) Vengeful (p.66-70); get the host.*
- *f) A state of being realistic and at the same time unrealistic. Past/present (p.84).*
- *g) Drinks to get rid of probs (p.86).*
- *h) George and Martha's relationship revealed by her (p.89).*
- *i) Truth and illusion—he doesn't know the difference and pretends to know (p.94).*
- *j) Uses his writing to create a son, and he kills him (p.107).*

Compare

1. *Both realize that the world is an illusion. (M.2c, G.i)*
2. *Both are writers.*
   - *a) Martin writes for Ruth.*
   - *b) Purpose of Georges writing unknown.*
3. *People did not have faith in them as writers.*
   - *a) George uses his writing to recreate/ create imaginary events. (g.f.,g.j.)*
4. *Heavy drinkers. drinks to relief from stress is what Martin does; Escapism for George.*
5. *Looked on as inferior when they first became involved with their women.*

Contrast

1. *George is very bitter, has erratic behavior. Martin is controlled in his feelings, at the end very apathetic. He was nice to people even after he became famous.*
2. *Martin is more realistic. George creates his own little world filled with his own stories.*
3. *The women in their lives had different effects on them.*
   - *a) George never tried to please Martha.*
   - *b) Martin tried everything in his power to do what Ruth wanted him to do.*

But it seemed like Martin made this transformation in himself, and the more he transformed himself the closer he seemed to resemble George.

Similarities

- *a) Writers without any faith*
- *b) World is an illusion*
- *c) Heavy drinkers*

Contrasts

- *a) Reality*
- *b) Behavior*
  1. *excitement vs. apathetic*
  2. *cruel treatment vs. generosity*

Under-Appreciated Artists

Two different identities from separate worlds—George, from Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, *the other, Martin, from Jack London's* Martin Eden*—are united by a common link; they are both drivers boxed in the same model of car on parallel roads. A model which is fueled by words; words which could create images and evoke feelings, but were never recognized for their true values. George and Martin were both aspiring writers trapped in a desire to create stories, works that were not fully appreciated. They led similar lifestyles, but were different in heart, in other words. They started in the same car model, but their roads soon branched off into separate avenues.*

Martin and George both wanted to create. George makes up stories, and creates a son. Who he believes to exist so much that when he kills him in the script he really believed he murdered him. Martin wrote out a need to write. Wikki, wikki incident.

In their road to write they both encountered the same obstacles; the people they cared for lacked faith in their writing talent. In response to George's first book "Daddy said . . . Look here, kid, you don't think for a second I'm going to let you publish this crap, do you?" And so Martha, his wife mocks George for trying to write a book. In response to their reaction to his book, George doesn't write another book. Although Martin was a prolific writer (in contrast to George), people he cared about did not believe that any of them were worth publishing. In his period of not being able to sell his goods his family and friends called him a bum. "Don't you think it's about time you got a job?" (p.253) were words he often heard.

George and Martin both drown themselves in liquor. When George is sorrowful, " . . . we [George and Martha] cry, and we take our tears, and we put 'em in the ice box, in the goddam ice trays until they're all frozen and then we put them . . . in our . . . drinks" (p.86). Martin after a day of hard work even with all his will to refrain from drinking, he gave in. After reading a disappointing letter from Ruth, Martin just wanted to forget his problem. "If I had gad the energy, he would have refused to consider the lie, because he wanted to forget. He started

for the village slowly and casually, increasing his pace in spite of himself as he neared the saloon" (p.142).

Through their ordeal they learned one common lesson—the world is an illusion. Martin could not understand why when he had starved and had needed food nobody was willing to invite him for dinner. But " . . . now that he could buy a hundred thousand dinners and was losing his appetite, dinners were thrust upon him right and left" (p.348). So even "he would forget the books he had opened and the world that had proved an illusion" (p.328). Martin's effort to enlighten himself with book knowledge and writing brought him fame, but it fame did not bring the happiness he had thought that it would bring. For the work he was selling now that he was famous, was the same work he had already done. The concept of "work performed" ate at him. "Truth and illusion, George; you don't know the difference" (p.94), Martha says. George's reply to Martha, "No, but we must carry on as though we did." And that is exactly what George did. He used his writing to create things in his life, such as a son. This is where George starts branching away from Martin.

George gets excited too easily. He'll raise his voice when talking to Martha. He is also very vindictive. When he was picked on about his book, he had to pick on the guest back. He realizes that the world is an illusion, but he plays along with it.

As opposed to Martin who never escapes reality. He knows that the world is cruel, so he is practical in approaching it. He also decides that he should leave by suiciding. His behavior is also apathetic to the world. He neither judges, cares, nor gets excited over matters. And as he got famous the people who had no faith in him he did not look down on them, and desire revenge.

Reader-Writer Workshop

by Maria Lewis to Ly Tong

A. Interpretation of character

1. I honestly feel you have knowledge about the characters. You have good quotes and found similarities and differences. I think you need to expand your thoughts towards the end. You also need some sort of paragraph tying the two characters together. Your opening is fabulous!

2. Yes. You show very clear similarities and you listed the differences at the end. Perhaps if you took the three contrasting ideas and put them together in three seperate paragraphs then it would flow more easily.

3. You said that they both lacked faith in their writing talent and they see the world as an illusion.

B. Suggestions for revision

1. Two different people from two different worlds are brought together by their interest in writing.

2. You use a very creative analogy. I really, really liked your idea about the cars. Maybe you could reword "George and Martin were under-appreciated authors." It sounds thrown in. Also you said they started out on parallel roads. Then you say they "started in the same cars, but their . . ." Maybe you could say the roads they were on branched off into different/separate avenues. You might want to expand the sentence. Also you said "they" were similar. I'm pretty sure you mean George and Martin but you might want to clarify it a little. I really did like it though, very creative!

4. I think you need some more analysis. The beginning is very good, but you might want to add some reasons as to why the characters are like that. Why do they wallow in self-pity? Why is it so important to them that they succeed in life as an author?

5. —

6. I think you need a conclusion. I'm assuming the last paragraph was not your conclusion. You can perhaps conclude by going back to your analogy about the cars.

The result is the exemplary essay presented earlier.

Prewriting Strategies for Teaching Interpretation

Interpretation as a kind of writing calls up, for many students, the literature examination: the class has read and studied a novel in common and takes a test containing a single interpretive question for the entire class. In another scenario, students are taught certain literary techniques, then given an unfamiliar poem or story and tested on their ability to interpret the work using their new understanding of tone or diction or allusion. Teachers who are engaged in classroom research or who have been working with the ideas and practices reflected in the *English–Language Arts Framework*, however, view interpretation in a much broader way, seeing interpretive writing range from dialectical and reflective journals to more traditional analysis.

"What Do You Make of It?"

Every time we use Louise Rosenblatt's provocative starter question "What do you make of it?" after the reading of a text, we are stimulat-

ing interpretive thinking. This question thrown out for small-group discussion or for a journal entry before discussion is an excellent way to initiate the kind of thinking that leads to good interpretive writing. It forces the burden of constructing meaning on the thinker/writer rather than on the teacher/expert or other secondary source critic.

The Dialectical Journal

The dialectical or dual-entry journal is an invaluable tool for readers/writers who are learning to trust their own interpretations. The basic instructions are simple.

Draw a line down the center of the page. On the left side, copy quotations from the text. You might select passages that intrigue you for various reasons: you may have had similar experiences or feelings; the passage may be confusing; you may disagree with the ideas expressed; you may want to explore an idea in your own words.

On the right side of the page, write your response to each passage you recorded. You might address such topics as these:

- What you think about this character's behavior
- What other poem/book/film/play this reminds you of
- What the passage might mean
- An experience of your own that is like that recounted in the passage
- What surprised you about this event/action
- What confused you about the passage
- What might happen next
- What stopped you at this point

The dialectical journal is one extremely useful technique for teaching interpretive thinking. See the other writing guides for other useful prewriting strategies.

Additional prewriting strategies appear in the other writing guides. Many of these suggestions are appropriate for interpretative writing as well.

Response and Revision

This peer revision guide is adapted from material developed by Charles Cooper.

Peer Response Guide for Student Partner

Answer the questions in the guide as honestly, completely, and clearly as you can. Write the kind of helpful response you would like to receive. Do not give *yes* or *no* answers—these are of little help in improving someone else's writing. If you are confused about any of the questions or instructions, your teacher will help you.

Use a fresh sheet of paper and put the following heading at the top: "Peer Response to the Writing of *(insert name of partner)*." Put your name in the top right-hand corner of the page. Use this format for each page of your response. At the end of the workshop, give your responses to your partner so that he or she can use them in revising the paper.

General Response to an Interpretive Paper About a Work of Fiction

Read over your partner's paper.

- Write a few sentences of honest comment on what you feel about the essay as a whole.
- Tell the writer whether his or her essay is readable and convincing.
- Tell the writer how he or she has provided insight into the main character/main issue.

Specific Response: Analyzing the Main Characteristics of an Interpretive Essay on Character

Now you will write a detailed, step-by-step description and analysis of the main characteristics of your partner's draft. This analysis will not only help your partner revise the draft but will teach you a great deal about your own writing.

Read your partner's draft for the second time and write your responses to the following requests. Refer to specific page numbers, paragraphs, and lines when you need to point out a particular place in your partner's draft.

- Paraphrase the writer's thesis or central idea about the character.
- Is the first paragraph clear or does it sound uncertain? Explain. If necessary, how can the writer improve the beginning?
- List the claims the writer makes; check to see whether the claims relate to the thesis.

- Note the supporting reasons given; check whether the evidence illustrates each reason. Does the student have some direct quotations as proof from the text? Is the support sufficiently detailed? If not, indicate where the writer needs to elaborate.
- Is there too much summary or too little analysis? Explain and make suggestions about how the writer might improve the balance.
- Note passages that are particularly effective—surprising ideas, memorable phrases, or striking images.
- If you find any places that are difficult to understand or need transitions, mark these passages.
- Read the concluding paragraph(s). The conclusion does not simply summarize—it should offer additional insights. Tell the writer your views on the conclusion and how it might be strengthened.

Using the Peer Response Guide: Revising Instructions to the Writer

The final decisions are the writer's. Remember that you are the *author* of the paper and that gives you the *authority* to say what you want and how you want it. But do consider your partner's responses very carefully; it is most important to know how readers respond to your writing.

For revising, it is very helpful if you can hear your words aloud. We strongly recommend two things:

- Read the draft aloud to yourself.
- Have someone read it aloud to you.

As you hear your words, you may identify awkward sentences or unclear ideas. Use your own knowledge plus that of your response partner to revise your paper.

Editing

This is the time to proofread your work and correct any spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors. Your revision is the finished product; the way you present your paper says a lot about you as a writer and about your concern for the reader. A paper filled with errors is difficult to read, and all of your wonderful ideas and hard work may be lost in the confusion.

The peer response revision process presents a rich, thorough format for students to use in helping each other revise their papers. There are many possible formats for response/revision. See the other writing guides for examples; many of them are for groups rather than for partners. Many teachers find that modeling response groups (having a small, trained group model for the entire class) is a useful way to introduce groups. Students need to learn how to read their papers aloud to others and to help guide the discussion so that they get real help with revision.

After students have completed their final drafts, you may want to have them write a journal entry assessing their revision process, describing the changes they made from their first draft, thinking about the total writing process, and perhaps forecasting changes for their next essays.

Classroom Writing Assignments

Interpretation essays are valid in classrooms across the curriculum as we ask students to interpret social behaviors, scientific laboratory experiment results, works of art, films, the meaning of changing styles in clothing or music. Remembering that interpretation serves to make meaning for the writer as well as to make meaning accessible or clear to the reader, teachers of all subjects will find this kind of writing a useful tool in the classroom.

While the classroom writing assignments suggested here may seem like the traditional, whole-class assignments, they assume a full range of teaching strategies—personal journals, dialectical journals, graphic interpretations of the metaphorical meanings of a work, group discussion, and so forth—as part of the interpretive process. Students who have had experience in the range of interpretive experiences will be able to handle test situations such as California's writing assessment with confidence.

Suggestions for Interpretation Essays

Language Arts

In preparing to write an interpretive essay on some aspect of a single novelist's work, students engage in the steps described here. A student may select an author from the teacher's list or have an individual choice approved, but each

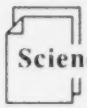
student must find at least one other student who will read the same author.

- Read at least three of the author's novels, keeping a dialectical journal during the reading.
- Get together with the other people in the class who have read this author for their study.
- After discussion of the works read, focus on dominant themes, ideas, symbols, kinds of characters, or typical settings that are common to this author's work.
- Prepare a group graphic display dealing with whatever the group feels is most significant about this author's work. The graphic may include both visual and verbal ingredients.
- Using the graphic and whatever other ideas the group has, present your author to the class. (Some groups may design interviews with authors, dramatize scenes, portion out sections for separate students' presentations, and so forth.) Follow the presentation with class discussion.
- As a final step in the author study project, each student is to write an interpretive essay on some aspect of the author's work.

After students have read a novel and seen a film based on that novel, ask groups to compare the two works with regard to plot and character motivation. After discussion of the various findings of different groups, ask students to write an interpretive essay on some aspect of the work that they found treated differently in the two media. (Examples of readily available film/novel combinations include *Lord of the Flies*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Cannery Row*, *East of Eden*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Separate Peace*.)

History–Social Science

In a social studies class, students conduct an independent study of the Viet Nam War and its effects on the country then and now. Some students read first-hand accounts of veterans; some read journals and journalistic accounts of those who evaded the draft; some study the effect of the Viet Nam War Memorial on families of soldiers killed in the war. One student, perhaps, visits the memorial in honor of a relative. Each student conducts at least one interview with someone who was affected by the Viet Nam War. After sharing their individual work in discussion groups and preparing their data—charts, graphics, pictures—each student writes an interpretive essay on some aspect of the effect of the Viet Nam War on a person, a group, or the entire country.



Science

During a laboratory experiment, students keep notes and drawings. Afterward, they interpret their findings, based on a careful analysis of their notes.

Mathematics

Interpret a graph or chart. For example, students may interpret a graph or chart showing the statistics of eighteen-year-olds voting in the national election. They may interpret a graph or chart showing the breakdown of expenses for a college freshman in a two-year college, a state university, and a private college or university. For these interpretations, students would need to find a focus for their thesis, make claims for their interpretation, and use support directly from the charts or graphs.

Additional Exemplary Student Essays

The first two essays included are examples of what experienced students can do in a timed-writing situation. These students were preparing for the *Advanced Placement Examination in English Literature*. Both students spent part of their class period jotting down notes, clustering, and listing key points they wanted to include.

The first discusses the tone or mood of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*; the second addresses a character's journey towards self-realization in *Song of Solomon*. Note that both students feel completely comfortable using the very personal *I* as they write their interpretations. Ly Tong, in the first essay, becomes so involved that he wants to "jump into the scene" to tell Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that they didn't

have to follow orders—a far cry from the sterile "The reader perceives that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are acting in a manner inimical to that of free-thinking human beings."

Life

by Ly Tong

Although an absurd tone is developed throughout Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, *the essence is far from being ridiculous. After I finished this play, I came to an understanding that life is only meaningful when I give it meaning by taking control of it.*

Through Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Stoppard was able to produce an absurd tone; these two characters themselves appeared to be absurd. They played this question game in which they both answered each other's questions with another question. Even more absurd is that Rosencrantz did not even catch onto this game until late into the play. Another incidence exemplifying their absurd behavior occurred when Rosencrantz, out of the blue, screams, "Fire!" When asked why he did what he did, Rosencrantz responded, "I'm demonstrating the misuse of free speech." Some may agree that screaming "Fire!" in a crowded room is not safe, but Stoppard's purpose of having Rosencrantz demonstrate this is to show Rosencrantz's and Guildenstern's tendency to conform. They always acted as they were instructed, and never asked any questions. They illustrate the idea of the absurdity of life when one does not take control of it.

Rosencrantz speaks of how he would hate to die and be boxed up in a wooden piece of material, but Stoppard shows that he is already dead. Rosencrantz does not live because he is not making his own decisions. "Incidents! All we get is incidents!" Rosencrantz believes that everything that happens to him is controlled by outside forces and not by him.

Guildenstern also speaks of how he is not in control of himself. "Free to move, speak, extemporize, and yet we have not been cut loose. Our truancy is defined by one fixed star . . . ." And thus Guildenstern behaves as if he has no say in his destiny. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern opened the King's letter a second time and saw that it ordered them to be killed, they did not halt the process. Why? Because they were absurd; they did not believe that they were capable of stopping their execution.

While I was reading Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, *and encountering their absurd behavior, I wanted to jump into the scene and tell them that they could act differently. When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern opened the King's letter and saw that it instructed them to kill Hamlet, I wanted to tell them to throw it away and not have anything to do with it, that that letter was their destruction. My reaction to the situation was an illustration of dramatic irony. I believe that Tom Stoppard used this literary technique to aid me into reaching a better understanding of life after finishing his play. I know now, more than ever, that I am the one in charge of my fate. Guildenstern somewhat came to this conclusion when he said, "There must have been a moment, at the beginning, where we could have said—no. But somehow we missed it." Guildenstern came to the realization that he was in charge of his life, but he neglected to realize that he would always be in charge—it's never too late. Stoppard intensified the tragedy of the lives of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with their physical as well as metaphorical deaths. He showed me that people who are apathetic and unmeaningful are bound to die and end their lives in tragedy.*

A Half-hearted Smile

by Julie Olson

After finishing Song of Solomon *by Toni Morrison, I was left feeling both content and upset. Part of me was smiling, but the other part was crying. Milkman's self-realization and happiness towards the end of the novel, along with Pilate's inner strength and capability to love made me feel good inside. However, the story of black oppression and the hate it caused which the author presented most vividly provoked me into wondering why society was so messed up in so many ways.*

The entire novel is really Milkman's journey towards self-realization. In the beginning, Milkman is unsure of himself and doesn't know who he is or what he wants out of life. He is ashamed because one leg is shorter than the other. He has an affair with his cousin Hagar and then cruelly rejects her when he is no longer interested. With his father's encouragement, he even attempts to rob his aunt of her "hidden treasure," a woman who never denied him anything and treated him like her son. However, when Milkman goes on his search for the infamous bag of gold, he finds something infinitely more valuable—himself. Old family friends tell him the story of his ancestors, and he comes to take pride in his heritage. He memorizes the song the children sing about Solomon and is thrilled to know that this man is one of the relatives. By the end of the novel, Milkman is truly sorry for the way he treated Hagar. He has gained a sense of self-confidence and inner peace. He is filled with joy as he realizes that, "If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it."

Pilate is spiritually the most beautiful human being in the novel. Her love is boundless. She takes Milkman under her wing and tries to teach him that spiritual wealth is more important than material wealth. Even after he steals the bag from her house, she goes to the police and humbles herself for his release. Also, she gives Hagar anything she wants and, though she has practically no money, she sends her granddaughter on a shopping spree when Milkman dumps her in hopes that it will cheer her up. And, despite the fact that she is rejected time and time

again as a child because she has no navel she never becomes bitter and is always generous with her love.

However, one underlying message of this novel left me quite a bit disturbed. Morrison does an ingenious job at showing the reader the hate and pain caused by the black man's treatment in a white society. The purpose of the Seven Days, the group to which Guitar belongs, is horrifying in itself. For every black that is killed by a white, they simply go out and kill any white at random. Of course, this is in protest of the lack of justice for the blacks. This hatred eventually leads Guitar to try and kill his own friend, Milkman. The only way Macon can think of to be respected in the world is to "own things." His entire life is spent trying to acquire more land and money. The artificial rose petals which fall in the snow at the beginning of the novel symbolize the blood of the negro in a white society—artificial because blacks are not considered "real people" by many of the whites.

And so, I am happy that Milkman finally "found himself," and I respect Pilate's courage and loving nature. But, more importantly, I have been given a glimpse of what it is like to be black and of why we must work to rid society of its prejudices and bigotry.

The following essay was written as part of an independent author study. Kelly Foster, a senior in Advanced Composition when she wrote this interpretation, read three Faulkner novels and completed all of the steps listed in the first English classroom writing assignment. She discussed her work with her response group and with her teacher as she worked, over a period of about a month, on this project.

Beyond the Surface: An Interpretation of William Faulkner's "The Bear"

by Kelly Foster

Read, interpret, and read again—
An author is done justice, only then.
– Jean Rostand

Few authors produce material worthy of repeated readings and interpretations; William Faulkner is one of the few. His short story, The Bear, *by virtue of its driving complexity, merits and demands more than a casual intake of words. In order to truly appreciate master and masterpiece, one must take full advantage of the many openings for interpretation in* The Bear. *It is far more than a dramatic tale of an epic bear hunt—there are an infinite number of underlying themes awaiting exploration. I realize this absence of limitations, and though I concentrate upon two major ideas for close examination, there is nothing to prevent me from expanding further in the future. What is so remarkable about Faulkner is that his work, by achieving success at many different levels, is as meaningful as the reader allows it to be. This reader was searching for substance and depth—insights into mankind and his world—Faulkner offers it all.*

Part I: Symbols of Destruction

Civilization is the paralysis of nature.
– Paul Gauguin

William Faulkner, in his short story The Bear, *shares and supports Gauguin's rather harsh and untraditional view of civilization; it is a destructive and negative force. Faulkner's vivid descriptions portray the once pristine innocence of a world that is gradually being destroyed by the march of progress. The story shows the long and demanding process of training, preparation, and purification necessary to gain acceptance by that wilderness, or in terms of myth, a second chance at Eden. Faulkner's message is clear—man is impure, nature is pure—it is only by discarding "civilization" that true harmony is reached.*

Faulkner uses the woods to represent a retreat for the boy, a retreat doomed to inevitable extinction by man's "progress." The raw wilderness signifies an escape from the world, from women, from struggle. Faulkner shows how the boy surrenders himself totally to the bear and nature, as man must do, in order to embrace the craved wild. Man must control his civilization process to prevent stifling of what is inherently good—nature.

The wilderness is the most obvious example of Faulkner's theme, yet he uses many other significant symbols as well. The Indian, Sam Fathers, represents the chief priest of the wilderness, as his name symbolically suggests. Sam prepares the boy for the disciplines of hunting, a sort of initiation into an organic relation with the wilderness and the life it contains. Sam teaches the boy the laws of nature—the qualities of survival—endurance, humility, and courage. He trains the boy in such things as "when to shoot and not to shoot." He is the guardian of the sacred wild—a relic of nature—sadly the last of his kind.

Certainly Faulkner suggests that civilization be questioned, and perhaps rejected completely. The gun, watch, and compass are representative of the typical gadgets of our mechanical society. When the boy discards them in his quest for the bear, he is actually abiding by the purification process. He is forced to conquer his fears, control his impulses, and surrender himself totally to the wilderness by his act. He accomplishes his goal—his painful break with the security of his world is not in vain; his initiation is successful and after abandoning the symbols of society, he sees the mystical bear. The wilderness has accepted him at last.

Old Ben, the bear, is much more than a bestial convenience to the plot. He is the epitome of the wilderness—its ideal—and in him all of nature's characteristics are found. He is a symbol of freedom, courage, and the fruitful earth. He is rather forlorn

and hopeless in his solitary state—he is, like Sam, the last of his kind. Old Ben is the mode by which the two polar opposites are allowed to diffuse—it is Ben that is the cause of men and nature meeting. The unavoidable clash resulting from that meeting has a predetermined outcome. Old Ben, after being hunted for all generations, will surely die, just as the impending death of civilization cannot be denied. Death is the result of old age and the long pursuit and destruction of man. When Old Ben finally accepts death—after many years of struggle—one must accept the fact that the wilderness is prepared to die as well.

Faulkner's symbolic story has profound implications. His intentions are far from obscure. He develops a situation of conflict—in this case civilization and wilderness—and he shows the callous destruction of one by the other. Civilization has triumphed—but has it really? No—for it is not a pure victory. Civilization is conquering nature with its destructiveness, greed, and corruption, and in so doing is shattering the peace and natural terrain. The ill effects cannot be ignored. It is not enough to lament the death of the old bear; it would be far better to prevent it. Faulkner is not content with the knowledge that the wilderness is being paralyzed, a slow and continuous process—he will not be satisfied until reparations are made.

Part II: A Touch of Mankind

"It touches all things which touch the heart—honor and pride, humility and pity, justice and freedom, and courage and endurance, and love."

William Faulkner's words, taken out of context, aptly describe the essence of The Bear. He deals with all these human emotions with a penetrating and unique vision of man's world. He shows compassionately the humility of a young boy, the pride of an ancient bear, the courage of a tiny pup, the endurance of a tormented race, and the love of a man for a beast. In "touching upon all these things" he accomplishes his goal—for it is so moving, that even the most callous heart is touched.

Faulkner speaks of the honor of being a hunter, "with the will and the hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive." It is an honor to be sought and earned, as the young boy Ike hopes to. Yet even in the pride is an element of humility—for though he can take pride in joining the hunters, he is awed by the fact of it, and humbly appreciates his position. The hunters are not a vainglorious group; this is shown by their drinking habits. Rather than toast their own egos, they salute the virtues of the hunt. A hunter has that lift in his heart, "as pristine as ever—the humble pride of hunting and pursuit."

Not all of Faulkner's characters temper their pride with humility, however. The old bear himself is one example, as is Lion, his antagonist. Old Ben was "dark and fierce, he would not be slain, he was passionate and proud." The wild dog, Lion, with indomitable and unbroken spirit, had a pride that could never be tamed or humbled. It is only in death that the two met their match. After many years of struggle, the bear realized "that it was time." Even in death Old Ben was not completely broken, for though he went down, he brought Sam and Lion with him.

Perhaps the death of Old Ben was justice, but more accurately it was a freedom. Sam's death, after many years of turmoil, was something of a blessing—it is only through death that he was freed. Ike, on the other hand, acquired his freedom without sacrificing his life. His first liberty was his rejection of the hold that civilization had upon him; "he relinquished of his own free will, in humility and peace, without regret: his watch, gun, and compass." Ike severed all ties with a society that unjustly was destroying the wilderness.

Justice, or lack thereof, is dealt with in another major issue as well—the southern slavery situation. Ike felt that it just wasn't "right" to accept human bondage as a way of life. He also keenly felt the injustice of the white man's claim to all land, and his heartless exclusion of the Indian and Negro. For Ike felt that God, in his inherently good intentions, vouchsafed the land on the condition of pity and humility and sufferance—of men—"not white nor black nor red, but men."

Freedom—the Negroes finally received their "freedom," but did they really? They were no more free of their past than are the descendants of Adam and Eve cleansed of original sin. True freedom was acquired by Ike, "Sam Fathers set me free," and Fonsiba and her Negro husband, who defy Cass and laws against miscegenation. The couple chose to cast off the burdens and prejudices of their past.

Not so easily are the scars of the past discarded. Faulkner says "they can learn nothing save through suffering" and perhaps it is true. Certainly the downtrodden slaves learned humility, and endurance, "they must endure and outlast until the curse (of slavery) is lifted." Lion was like the mistreated Negro, for he perfected the technique of enduring the unbearable. "He had not only courage and weight and speed and all else that makes up the will and desire to pursue and kill, but endurance, the will and desire to endure beyond all imaginable limits of flesh in order to overtake and slay." There was a little of Lion in Sam Fathers as well, as he endured the humiliation of his background. One character was called to endure more than she possibly could—Eunice discovered that her lover had lain with her daughter, and rather than live with that fact, she drowned herself.

Endurance can be intertwined with love, or at least a direct indicator of it. Boon willingly endured his own pain rather than allow Lion, whom he loved, to suffer. Courage, too, abounds when feelings of love promote it. Such was the case when Boon, who never had the stamina to shoot or kill anything, not even a squirrel, mustered his will and strength to kill

Old Ben when he threatened Lion. Boon's love for Lion is moving in its simplistic causation—it is heartwarming to see him flare with anger when he is threatened with separation from Lion.

Boon is not the only one with raw courage. Perhaps the best example of a brave soul is seen in the little fyce. This dog's courage was such that it bordered on reckless foolhardiness. It challenged Old Ben himself—and thus asserted its proud spirit. Thus is seen the connection with pride and courage, for surely the brave are proud of their right to that title. And so all of these virtues of man are bound together. If these categorical emotions were not in such close association, Faulkner could hardly deal with them effectively in such a short novel. But they are alike in that they are meaningful to all men—on all levels. Perhaps that one factor is what makes Faulkner so appealing.

Guidelines for Writing Prompts for Interpretation

Interpretation requires a student to assert a meaning (idea, claim, thesis, insight) about a text or some data and to justify that meaning with reasons and evidence. The student must construct an argument, rather than merely retell or summarize.

The three types of closely related prompts that are required to assess interpretation are based on the following:

- A given text (presented in the prompt)
- A remembered text
- A set of data (table, chart, graph, list)

Following are guidelines for drafting the writing situation and directions for writing for interpretation prompts. The prompts included model these guidelines.

Writing Situation

Establish a motive for reading or recalling the text or analyzing the data, usually by saying that a teacher requests it.

Mention *interpret* or *interpretation*.

Given Text. Name the text and identify the writer. Indicate the date the text was written and the nationality of the writer, if appropriate. You may describe the process of interpretation by using or adapting the following sentences from a poem prompt:

> To interpret a poem, you read it a number of times. You try to decide what the poem might mean to you. You look at the parts of the poem to decide whether your idea of the meaning fits all parts of the poem—even the lines that may have surprised or puzzled you at first. You examine the words and images in the poem in order to decide how they convey meaning and emotional impact.

Do not focus the interpretation in any way or lead the student to look at the text in a particular way.

Remembered Text. Identify a focus for interpretation (character conflict, a character's growth in self-knowledge, significance of setting, and so forth).

Invite students to recall and analyze specific texts (novel, story, poem, play, autobiography, and so forth) they have read recently in English class or on their own. Exclude nonfiction texts because the meaning is nearly always explicit.

Do not lead the student to interpret the focus in a particular way.

Data Sets. Identify the source and date. Invite students to analyze or interpret the given data for a particular purpose.

In a separate but brief paragraph, establish a purpose for writing. Mention readers or identify a particular reader. It may be appropriate to identify a publication source or a specific use for the writing (school newspaper, sharing interpretations with other students, and so forth).

Directions for Writing

Begin the directions "Write an essay interpreting . . ." or "Write an interpretation of . . . ." Mention *meaning*, *interpretation*, *claim*, *reasons*, and *evidence*. Use the word *convince* or *convincing*. It may be appropriate to use the words *analyze* or *explain*.

Avoid leading the student or suggesting how the essay might be organized. Do not suggest how the student should begin (for example, by identifying a work and author or by describing a character). Conclude the directions by again mentioning readers, perhaps in a sentence beginning "Try to convince your readers that your interpretation is a thoughtful one" or ". . . that you have thought carefully about your interpretation."

Keep sentences relatively brief and choose accessible vocabulary.

Title each prompt in a way that helps students keep their focus on the writing situation.

Note: These guidelines should not constrain classroom writing assignments or student writing projects. Good classroom assignments and projects may share certain features of prompts—purposefulness, specific readers, suggestions about strategies—but classroom assignments need not observe the constraints on test prompts. These guidelines are designed solely to enable consultants to write prompts for the writing assessment.

Examples of Prompts Written in the California Format

Interpreting a Work of Literature
[insert name of selection]

Writing Situation. The following selection was written by [name of author, nationality, and dates]. Read the selection carefully and think about how you might interpret it. Try to decide whether your idea of the meaning fits all parts of the work, even those that may have surprised or puzzled you at first.

[Include selection here.]

Your English teacher has asked you to write an essay interpreting this selection. Explore what it means to you, and decide how you will interpret it.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay interpreting [name of selection]. Analyze the selection to explain its meaning. As you present your interpretation, support your claims about the meaning with reasons and evidence. Try to convince your teacher that you have thought carefully about your interpretation.

Interpreting Connections Between Literary Works

Writing Situation. Often we can see a connection between two literary works. The works may be quite unlike each other, but something seems to link them in your mind. They share a common theme, a setting, or a certain mood.

Your English teacher has asked you to write an essay interpreting the connection between two literary works. You will be sharing your essays with the class. Think about the stories, poems, novels, or plays you have read recently and the ways one work might be connected with another. Select two works that you think have an interesting connection.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay interpreting a connection between two literary works. You will want to describe the connection; but most important, you will want to explore the meaning or significance of it. As you present your interpretation, support your claims about the meaning of the connection with reasons and evidence. Try to convince your teacher and the other students that your interpretation is a thoughtful one.

History–Social Science or Literature

Writing Situation. There is an old saying, "We are our own worst enemies." From the historical figures or literary characters you have become acquainted with this semester, think about those who seem to have been their own worst enemies. These people may have caused their own problems that led to social unrest, war, or more private and personal anguish—physical or mental illnesses.

Directions for Writing. Select one historical or literary individual who seems to you to have been his or her own worst enemy. Write an essay for your teacher, who is familiar with the background (the social period or the literary work). Show how this character contributed to the problems he or she had. Show how the person was able or unable to overcome these problems.

Essays Written for the State Assessment

High-range Achievement

In this interpretation, the student provides both a personal response and a context for the discussion of the work. The writer supports her interpretation of the meaning of the poem by using textual evidence as well as personal references to contemporary society.

An Interpretation of "Learning by Doing" by Howard Nemerov

When I finish the poem my eyes slide slowly towards the title, "Learning by Doing" by Howard Nemerov. Underneath this title which does not seem to have any connection with the poem, I read the words "constructive technological destructiveness." Now I understand; the meaning of the poem is clear. To learn by doing in the case of the poor tree that is wrongly torn down is "constructive technological destructiveness." What a great paradox these words evoke; to learn and strive for greater technology to benefit mankind. Man must destroy precious things. The main idea of this poem, man's brutality to nature and to man himself, symbolically, for the sake of success, is exemplified in the quotations, "whatever cannot carry its own weight/has got to go" and ". . . you learn to bury your mistakes."

Both quotations are themes of the poem which can be elaborated upon. The first quotation which symbolizes the superficiality of our society, "whatever cannot carry its own weight/has got to go," serves as a reminder of how mankind takes things for granted in this age of disposability. It is a frightening insight into a society where failure to carry out one's assigned "duty" is punishable by ostracism or, as in the case of the tree, death. People, as well as inanimate objects, are not allowed to rot and spoil in our world where old age and fermentation of any kind is loathed. Instead we get face lifts, ship our senile to remote convalescent homes, or knock down classic homes and noble trees that seem to serve no purpose now. They are simply reminders of the past, a hindrance, while mankind leaps toward the future with its great social and technological "advances."

The quotation ". . . you learn to bury your mistakes" is also a commentary on modern society. Taking the life of a great and noble tree is a brutal error, yet the tree experts shrug their shoulders and turn away as all remains of the tree are eradicated. Now that the grave mistake cannot be altered the next best solution, for our society, is to forget that the tree ever existed. This is an all too common occurrence in the world today. Atrocities, hideous over-or-under-estimations, unreachable expectations are continuously swept under the rug, hidden from the public. A concise example of this burying of mistakes is the numerous cover-ups our government has undertaken to keep various nuclear power/waste slip-ups out of the public eye. In the government's view these mistakes will do no one harm if the public is ignorant of them. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Many people are slowly dying because of their government's mistakes.

This poem serves as a warning to society. A warning that things are not as they seem in this world. Corruption and destruction are all around us and it is up to the individual to make a difference.

Mid-range Achievement

The next writer provides a context, presents interpretive claims clearly, and supports them with textual evidence. The writer uses both summary and analysis. This essay would receive a score placing it at the upper end of the mid-range papers, indicating that it is above average but not outstanding in its interpretive insights.

Character Change

In traveling through the world of literature, we may often come across characters that are attractive, even magnetic. However, as we read on, these characters may lose our interest, respect, and attraction. One such character that fits this course is Ruth, from Jack London's Martin Eden. Ruth seems to be attractive through half of the story, and then suddenly her attitudes and actions repel me from her.

Ruth is the daughter of a bourgeois family, who encounters a young man, from the working class, Martin Eden. Upon this encounter, Ruth is strangely attracted to the power, strength, and animal-like nature of Martin. However, Martin has been highly uneducated, and is unfamiliar with her lifestyle. Rebelliously, Ruth is firm in her intentions, and shows them as she is determined to help Martin become educated, and respectable. At this part of the novel, I am strongly attracted to Ruth, for she is helping another in becoming a better person. My attraction grows even stronger when she admits her love to this working-class man, and is set on living with him. This action of Ruth's is genuinely respectable, for she has gone against her father's and mother's expectations, and against the morals of the bourgeois class. Her rebellion in doing what she feels is right, as opposed to what her class and family expects, is commendable.

These feelings I have for Ruth continue until she becomes unaccepting of Martin. Ruth begins to display selfishness as she wants Martin to get a job that makes money, not one that he enjoys. Also, Ruth shows signs of living for the bourgeoisie again, as she lives up to their selfish, materialistic, and pompous standards. This can be seen as Ruth becomes embarrassed and ashamed of Martin as he brings a poor family to the bourgeois side of town to buy them gifts. Ruth does not accept this action, and is further ashamed in front of her bourgeois friends.

As Ruth continued these selfish feelings I began to lose respect for her more and more. I thought she was going to be ever-victorious in abolishing the standards of the bourgeoisie, but she has gone back to living for them. This is the decline of Ruth, and my respect for her, as she has failed to live for herself, and by her own standards.

Low-range Achievement

In this paper the writer responds to a prompt asking for an interpretation of a poem. There is no introduction; in fact, the writer fails to identify the work. There is an attempt at an interpretive claim and some quoted textual support. The paper is brief, lacking effective organization.

This sounds to me like a father telling his son about how he felt watching him run, he felt like it was he who was in the race.

The father could feel everything and made him think of when he ran races.

"With all the power that is in you," means give all you have, its a short dash, save nothing no time to pace yourself, run as fast as you can, don't slow down until you break the tape.

Example of a Published Interpretation

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the wood and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

– Robert Frost

Robert Frost: The Way to the Poem[1]

by John Ciardi

The school system has much to say these days of the virtue of reading widely, and not enough about the virtues of reading less but in depth. There are any number of reading lists for poetry, but there is not enough talk about individual poems. Poetry, finally, is one poem at a time. To read any one poem carefully is the ideal preparation for reading another. Only a poem can illustrate how poetry works.

Above is a poem—one of the master lyrics of the English language, and almost certainly the best-known poem by an American poet. What happens in it? —which is to say, not what does it mean, but how does it mean? How does it go about being a human reenactment of a human experience?

Even the TV audience can see that this poem begins as a seemingly simple narration of a seemingly simple incident but ends by suggesting meanings far beyond anything specifically referred to in the narrative. And even readers with only the most casual interest in poetry might be made to note the additional fact that, though the poem suggests those larger meanings, it is very careful never to abandon its pretense to being simple narration. There is duplicity at work. The poet pretends to be talking about one thing, and all the while he is talking about many others.

Many readers are forever unable to accept the poet's essential duplicity. It is almost safe to say that a poem is never about what it seems to be about. As much could be said of the proverb. The bird in the hand, the rolling stone, the stitch in time never (except by an artful double-deception) intend any sort of statement about birds, stones, or sewing. The incident of this poem, one must conclude, is at root a metaphor.

Duplicity aside, this poem's movement from the specific to the general illustrates one of the basic formulas of all poetry. Such a grand poem as Arnold's "Dover Beach" and such lesser, though unfortunately better known, poems such as Longfellow's "The Village Blacksmith" and Holmes' "The Chambered Nautilus" are built on the same progression. In these three poems, however, the generalization is markedly set apart from the specific narration, and even seems additional to the telling rather than intrinsic to it. It is this sense of division one has in mind in speaking of "a tacked-on moral."

There is nothing wrong in itself with a tacked-on moral. Frost, in fact, makes excellent use of the device at times. In this poem, however, Frost is careful to let the whatever-the-moral-is grow out of the poem itself. When the action ends the poem ends. There is no epilogue and no explanation. Everything pretends to be about the narrated incident. And that pretense sets the basic tone of the poem's performance of itself.

The dramatic force of that performance is best observable, I believe, as a progression in three scenes.

In scene one, which coincides with stanza one, a man—a New Englander—is driving his sleigh somewhere at night. It is snowing, and as the man passes a dark patch of woods he stops to watch the snow descend into the darkness. We know, moreover, that the man is familiar with those parts (he knows who owns the woods and where the owner lives), and we know that no one has seen him stop. As scene one forms itself in the theatre of the mind's

[1] John Ciardi, *How Does a Poem Mean?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 1959.

eye, therefore, it serves to establish some as yet unspecified relation between the man and the woods.

It is necessary, however, to stop here for a long parenthesis. Even so simple an opening statement raises any number of questions. It is impossible to address all the questions that rise from the poem stanza by stanza, but two that arise from stanza one illustrate the sort of thing one might well ask of the poem detail by detail.

Why, for example, does the man not say what errand he is on? What is the force of leaving the errand generalized? He might just as well have told us that he was going to the general store, or returning from it with a jug of molasses he had promised to bring Aunt Harriet and two suits of long underwear he had promised to bring the hired man. Frost, moreover, can handle homely detail to great effect. He preferred to leave his motive generalized. Why?

And why, on the other hand, does he say so much about knowing the absent owner of the woods and where he lives? Is it simply that one set of details happened-in whereas another did not? To speak of things "happening-in" is to assault the integrity of a poem. Poetry cannot be discussed meaningfully unless one can assume that everything in the poem—every last comma and variant spelling—is in it by the poet's specific act of choice. Only bad poets allow into their poems what is haphazard or cheaply chosen.

The errand, I will venture a bit brashly for lack of space, is left generalized in order the more aptly to suggest any errand in life and, therefore, life itself. The owner is there because he is one of the forces of the poem. Let it do to say that the force he represents is the village of mankind (that village at the edge of winter) from which the poet finds himself separated (has separated himself?) in his moment by the woods (and to which, he recalls finally, he has promises to keep). The owner is he-who-lives-in-his-village-house, thereby locked away from the poet's awareness of the-time-the-snow-tells as it engulfs and obliterates the world the village man allows himself to believe he "owns." Thus, the owner is a representative of an order of reality from which the poet has divided himself for the moment, though to a certain extent he ends by reuniting with it. Scene one, therefore, establishes not only a relation between the man and the woods, but the fact that the man's relation begins with his separation (though momentarily) from mankind.

End parenthesis one, begin parenthesis two.

Still considering the first scene as a kind of dramatic performance of forces, one must note that the poet has meticulously matched the simplicity of his language to the pretended simplicity of the narrative. Clearly, the man stopped because the beauty of the scene moved him, but he neither tells us that the scene is beautiful nor that he is moved. A bad writer, always ready to overdo, might have written: "The vastness gripped me, filling my spirit with the slow steady sinking of the snow's crystalline perfection into the glimmerless profundities of the hushed primeval wood." Frost's avoidance of such a spate illustrates two principles of good writing. The first, he has stated himself in "The Moving": "*Anything more* than the truth would have seemed too weak" (italics mine). Understatement is one of the basic sources of power in English poetry. The second principle is to let the action speak for itself. A good novelist does not tell us that a given character is good or bad (at least not since the passing of the Dickens tradition): he shows us the character in action and then, watching him, we know. Poetry, too, has fictional obligations: even when the characters are ideas and metaphors rather than people, they must be characterized in action. A poem does not talk about ideas; it enacts them. The force of the poem's performance, in fact, is precisely to act out (and thereby to make us act out emphatically—that is, to feel out, that is, to identify with) the speaker and why he stopped. The man is the principal actor in this little "drama of why" and in scene one he is the only character, though as noted, he is somehow related to the absent owner.

End second parenthesis.

In scene two (stanzas two and three) a foil is introduced. In fiction and drama, a foil is a character who "plays against" a more important character. By presenting a different point of view or an opposed set of motives, the foil moves the more important character to react in ways that might not have found expression without such opposition. The more important character is thus more fully revealed—to the reader and to himself. The foil is the horse.

The horse forces the question, why did the man stop? Until it occurs to him that his "little horse must think it queer" he had not asked himself for reasons. He had simply stopped. But the man finds himself faced with the question he imagines the horse to be asking: What is there to stop for-out there in the cold, away from bin and stall (house and village and mankind?) and all that any self-respecting beast could value on such a night? In sensing that other view, the man is forced to examine his own more deeply.

In stanza two the question arises only as a feeling within the man. In stanza three, however (still scene two), the horse acts. He gives his harness bells a shake. "What's wrong?" he seems to say. "What are we waiting for?"

By now, obviously, the horse—without losing its identity as horse—has also become a symbol. (A symbol is something that stands for something else.) Whatever that something else may be, it certainly begins at that order of life that does not understand why a man stops in the wintry middle of nowhere to watch the snow come down. (Can one fail to sense by now that the dark and snowfall symbolize a death wish,

however momentary, i.e., that hunger for final rest and oblivion that a man may feel, but not a beast?)

So by the end of scene two the performance has given dramatic force to three elements that work upon the man. There is his relation to the world of the owner. There is his relation to the brute world of the horse. And there is that third presence of the unknowable world, the movement of the all-engulfing snow across all the orders of life, the man's, the owner's, and the horse's—with the difference that the man knows of that second dark-within-dark of which the horse cannot, and the owner will not, know.

The man ends scene two with all these forces working upon him simultaneously. He feels himself moved to a decision. And he feels a last call from the darkness: "the sweep/Of easy wind and downy flake." It would be so easy and so downy to go into the woods and let himself be covered over.

But scene three (stanza four) produces a fourth force. This fourth force can be given many names. It is certainly better, in fact, to give it many names than to attempt to limit it to one. It is social obligation, or personal commitment, or duty, or just the realization that a man cannot indulge a mood forever. All of these and more. But finally he has a simple decision to make. He may go into the woods and let the darkness and the snow swallow him from the world of beast and man. Or he must move on. And unless he is going to stop here forever, it is time to remember that he has a long way to go and that he had best be getting there. (So there is something to be said for the horse, too.)

There and only then, his question driven more and more deeply into himself by these cross-forces, does the man venture a comment on what attracted him: "The woods are lovely, dark and deep." His mood lingers over the thought of that lovely dark-and-deep (as do the very syllables in which he phrases the thought), but the final decision is to put off the mood and move on. He has his man's way to go and his man's obligations to tend to before he can yield. He has miles to go before his sleep. He repeats that thought and the performance ends.

But why repetition? The first time Frost says, "And miles to go before I sleep," there can be little doubt that the primary meaning is: "I have a long way to go before I get to bed tonight." The second time he says it, however, "miles to go" and "sleep" are suddenly transformed into symbols. What are those "something-elses" the symbols stand for? Hundreds of people have tried to ask Mr. Frost that question and he has always turned it away. He has turned it away because he cannot answer it. He could answer some part of it. But some part is not enough.

For the symbol is like a rock dropped into a pool: it sends out ripples in all directions, and the ripples are in motion. Who can say where the last ripple disappears? One may have a sense that he knows the approximate center point of the ripples, the point at which the stone struck the water. Yet even then he has trouble marking it surely. How does one make a mark on water? Oh very well—the center point of that second "miles to go" is probably approximately in the neighborhood of being close to meaning, perhaps, "the road of life"; and the second "before I sleep" is maybe that close to meaning "before I take my final rest," and the rest in darkness that seemed so temptingly dark-and-deep for the moment of the mood. But the ripples continue to move and the light to change on the water, and the longer one watches the more changes he sees. Such shifting-and-being-at-the-same-instant is of the very sparkle and life of poetry. One experiences it as one experiences life, for every time he looks at an experience he sees something new, and he sees it change as he watches it. And that sense of continuity in fluidity is one of the primary kinds of knowledge, and one that only the arts can teach, poetry foremost among them.

Frost himself certainly did not ask what that repeated last line meant. It came to him and he received it. He "felt right" about it. And what he "felt right" about was in no sense a "meaning" that, say, an essay could apprehend, but an act of experience that could be fully presented only by the dramatic enactment of forces which is the performance of the poem.

Readings and Resources for Interpretive Thinking and Writing

Rather than gathering an extensive list of interpretive essays, which may be found in many textbooks as well as in journals and magazines, we are listing here just a few of those references. More importantly, however, we are listing some of the more recent books that deal with current thinking about and strategies for teaching interpretation.

Interpretive Essays About Literature

Twentieth Century Views. Edited by Maynard Mack and others. New York: Prentice Hall, Inc. This three-volume series consists of a collection of critical essays on scores of authors, including Twain, Eliot, Frost, Hemingway, Melville, and Shakespeare. Each collection of essays on a major writer is edited by a specialist on that writer.

Ciardi, John, and William Miller. *How Does a Poem Mean?* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959.

Kennedy, X.J. *An Introduction to Poetry* (Sixth edition). Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1986.

Perrine, Laurence. *Sound and Sense: An Introduction to Poetry* (Sixth edition). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.
Perrine, Laurence, and Thomas R. Arp. *Story and Structure*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.

Resources for Teaching Interpretive Thinking and Writing

NCTE Publications, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801:

The English Journal.
Enhancing Aesthetic Reading and Response.
Cultivating Thinking in English and the Language Arts.
Literature as Exploration by Louise Rosenblatt.
The Reader, The Text, The Poem by Louise Rosenblatt.
Transactions with Literature. Edited by Edmund J. Farrell and James R. Squire.

Boynton/Cook Publishers, A Division of Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 70 Court Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801:

Forming, Thinking, Writing by Ann E. Berthoff and James Stephors.
Readers, Texts, Teachers. Edited by Bill Corcoran and Emrys Evans.
Only Connect: Uniting Reading and Writing. Edited by Thomas Newkirk.

Interpretation

In California's writing assessment framework, interpretive writing invites students to say what a text or other data might mean and to justify the meanings they see. It requires thoughtful, patient reading (and rereading) and careful analysis. We classify it as argumentative writing because it occurs in a writing situation where alternative meanings are defensible—where a writer's readers may prefer meanings that are different from the writer's.

Writers of interpretive essays must identify the subject being interpreted but only to the extent that readers may require it; offer meanings by making a claim or claims about the subject; provide evidence from the subject to support or justify the meanings; and maintain a focused, authoritative interpretive stance throughout the essay.

While the *rhetorical* aspect of the assessment focuses on the distinctive features of writing types, the *effectiveness* aspect guides us to look carefully at the more comprehensive features of coherence and style. Coherence, a sense of organization, flow, and focus, is essential to all good writing. The coherent essay has a clear direction, each section flowing naturally from the preceding one. Coherence is demonstrated to readers through emphasis, organization, and repetition achieved through recurrences of language, syntax, and ideas. Style, for the purposes of this assessment, is observable in two written language features: (1) *sentence control* and (2) *word choice* or *diction*. In assessment of the effectiveness of style, the primary considerations are *appropriateness*, *precision*, and *control*.

The prompts may ask students to decide what a poem might mean, reach conclusions about character relationships in short stories or about data on social phenomena (like TV watching), or make inferences about remembered fictional characters' conflicts or growth in self-knowledge.

With 45 minutes to write one draft, students face a special challenge in announcing early at least some of the claims they intend to make. They also have to orient readers adequately to the essay by presenting the subject and forecasting the purpose and direction of the essay.

In a one-draft test situation, students may have difficulty achieving such a strong start, in large part because they begin writing with only a partial idea of what they want to say.

With or without a strong start, students need to keep readers on track by pointing explicitly to claims they are making about the subject, and they need to lead readers toward a conclusive interpretation. Most important, along the way, students must amass enough specific relevant evidence from the subject (text or data) itself to convince readers that the claims are justified. Instead of retelling or summarizing, they have to present evidence from the subject in a way that supports their claims. Finally, writers have to maintain throughout the essay an authoritative (though not dogmatic or polemical), interpretive stance, assuring readers that they know the subject well and have some interesting (preferably nonobvious) ideas about it.

Score Point 6 – Exceptional Achievement

Point of Departure. The writer orients the reader through a clear and concise identification of the subject being interpreted. The writer provides context to help readers follow the interpretation.

The beginning seems purposeful in that it sets up the interpretation, orienting the reader to what is to come, perhaps even forecasting explicitly the direction the essay will take.

Interpretive Claims. The writer presents interpretive claims that are unusually perceptive. The claims may be unexpected or even contrary to a predictable interpretation.

Evidence. The writer supports interpretive claims with various kinds of evidence: in writing about literature, for example, quotations, paraphrases, and citing/reviewing specific events are appropriate. The writer provides substantial evidence to support major claims. The writer goes

well beyond the immediate response most writers would give. Each section of the essay is developed coherently. Language is consistently used with precision and appropriateness. The writer exhibits an exceptional control of a variety of sentence structures and maintains connections between ideas. The overall essay has a consistently smooth forward movement. The writer avoids unsubstantiated generalizations and oversimplifications.

The writer uses "data" from the subject as concrete evidence in an explicit, pointed, convincing interpretation. The writer clearly knows the difference between retelling or summarizing and amassing relevant, concrete evidence to support an interpretive claim.

Interpretive Stance. The writer seems authoritative and committed to justifying claims adequately. The writer knows how to write an interpretive essay and clearly wants to persuade readers that the interpretation is reasonable and valid. The reader never loses sight of the writer's point and can see that the argument advances logically to a convincing and satisfying conclusion. The reader is never left to infer the relevance of evidence, examples, or retelling. The writer does not substitute retelling, summary, or brief and general examples for concrete evidence and insightful reasoning.

The writer may acknowledge that readers favor alternative interpretations. The writer may evaluate alternative interpretations, accepting or rejecting them tactfully.

Score Point 5 – Commendable Achievement

Point of Departure. Like the writer of a six-point essay, this writer provides a context for the subject of the interpretation. The writer presents an appropriate amount of background information about the subject. The opening announces at least one claim about the subject and may forecast the direction the essay will take.

While a six-point essay always begins with a strong opening claim and focus, a five-point essay may work its way into an idea or claim about its subject. Eventually, though, it reaches a clear focus or point.

Interpretive Claims. As in a six-point essay, the writer presents claims clearly. The writer makes perceptive claims.

Evidence. The writer does not rely on summary and includes adequate evidence to support major claims so that the interpretation seems convincing. Evidence may not be as full or insightful as in a six-point essay. A five-point essay may lack the unfaltering smoothness of the six-point essay. A five-point essay will show the writer's ability to use words appropriately. Word choice may show less versatility than in the six-point essay; however, the diction is still consistently strong and controlled throughout the essay. The writer exhibits sustained control of a variety of sentence structures. The writer clearly knows how to construct an interpretation.

Interpretive Stance. Like the writer of a six-point essay, the writer seems authoritative and attempts to convince readers that the interpretation is reasonable. The writer seems thoughtful and clearly understands how to justify an interpretation. The writer may acknowledge alternative interpretations.

Score Point 4 – Adequate Achievement

Point of Departure. The writer of the four-point essay orients readers adequately to the subject but may not always establish an overall structure for the interpretation. The writer identifies the subject and presents enough information about it for the designated readers and may even forecast some part of what is to be discussed. The context usually includes one claim about the subject. The writer of a four-point essay may begin unsteadily but eventually will write his or her way around to a focus, but not so insightfully as a writer of a five-point essay.

Interpretive Claims. The writer of a four-point paper makes at least one clear but sometimes predictable claim.

Evidence. To support the interpretation, the writer offers evidence from the source. The evidence may be general, lacking specific detail. The language in the four-point essay may be somewhat conventional and predictable. The essay shows a sustained control of sentence structure but may have less variety than the five- and six-point essays The writer may rely too much on generalization or summary.

The writer presents an adequate, expected response.

Interpretive Stance. The writer knows how to go about justifying an interpretation.

1. The writer may not reveal the main point until the conclusion but finally does so.

   – or –

2. The writer may set up the interpretation impressively and support it explicitly (as in a five- or six-point essay) but not amass nearly enough relevant evidence to impress readers.

   – or –

3. The writer may provide a "reading" of the subject that offers a series of interesting claims but does not consistently connect them to a main point or major claim.

Score Point 3 – Some Evidence of Achievement

Point of Departure. The writer may begin with a perfunctory introduction in which the subject is simply identified without additional information. The background and context for the essay are quickly sketched.

Interpretive Claims. The claims seem obvious; or if they are thoughtful, they are developed inadequately.

Evidence. The writer may summarize the work or narrate an event rather than offer concrete evidence. Although the reader can understand the major ideas, there may be irrelevant details, digressions, and/or repetitions that hamper the forward movement. The writer shows basic control of simple sentences, but the three-point essay has little sentence variety. The word choice is usually appropriate to the content; however, the writer may rely on general rather than specific language.

Interpretive Stance. The writer of a three-point essay seems to know about some features of supporting an interpretation but cannot yet bring them together in a balanced, convincing way. The writer seems to lack confidence or awareness of readers' needs.

Score Point 2 – Little Evidence of Achievement

Point of Departure. The introduction is either brief or unfocused. The writer may identify the subject but usually fails to identify any claims in the opening.

Interpretive Claims. The writer may introduce no explicit interpretive claims anywhere in the essay. Any claims presented seem obvious. Claims may be too broad or general and may be contradictory. The writer relies on generalizations or summaries. The writer may indicate some understanding beyond the literal level.

Evidence. Little if any relevant evidence is presented.

Interpretive Stance. The writer seems confused and is clearly struggling to present an interpretation. The essay may be incomplete, out of balance, or superficial.

Score Point 1 – Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Point of Departure. Context may be missing, abrupt, or confusing.

Interpretive Claims. The writer fails to present interpretive claims. The writer may merely summarize the subject, usually in a few lines. The writer stays on a literal level.

Evidence. The writer presents neither specific support not personal reactions. The reader is frequently confused about relationships between sentences and ideas. There are frequent lapses in sentence sense, resulting in confusion. The writer is on topic but does not refer to a text or to data presented in the prompt.

Interpretive Stance. The writer responds to the prompt but does not seem to understand what is required in interpretive writing situations.

Unscorable – Inappropriate Response

Off topic. No response. Written in a foreign language.

Observational Writing

Observational writing records a writer's perceptions of an object, a person, a place, an animal, or an event. The observational essay presents a singular perspective on the subject observed. The writer creates this perspective through the selection of details, through the angle from which the subject is viewed, and through the broad or narrow focus of the observation. Observational writing may be done on the spot, as in field notes or a laboratory experiment; or it may be written up later from notes or memory.

In its most basic form, observational writing stems from an actual eyewitness observation. Because of the power of visual imagination, it may also depict a record of the writer's observations as experienced through literature, film, and television.

Observational writing is a foundational mode of writing for many of the other writing types. Like autobiographical incident, observational writing is grounded in personal experience. However, the stance of the observational writer is that of an eyewitness, rather than of a participant. Like report of information, observational writing moves the writer from the center of action to the periphery. The writer of report of information often relies on secondary sources, whereas the observational writer filters direct experience through individual perception and attempts to envision the experience of the reader. The observational stance may involve the clarification of meaning as a characteristic of interpretation, the judgment and appraisal of evaluation, and the hypothesizing about reasons and consequences inherent in speculation. Observational writing is very often the foundation for the meditative extensions of reflective essay.

The California writing assessment delineates observational writing as a specific type of writing for assessment purposes even while recognizing that, as a foundational type of writing, it is rarely found without some evidence of other types of writing. Interpretation, reflection, autobiographical incident—these are natural extensions of the observational stance. For the purposes of teaching observational writing as a type, however, we look to the primary focus of the essay. As you will see from the exemplary papers included in this guide, observation provides the dominant focus.

Importance of Observational Writing

Coming to terms with experience, ordering our conceptions of the world we live in and of ourselves as operators in that world—these key

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> concepts seem to me to define a discourse role that needs to be recognized and strongly underscored in any theory of language functions.
> – James Britton

Observational writing fulfills the key concepts of the discourse role defined here by James Britton: the keen observer who attempts to articulate his or her unique perceptual experience makes meaning out of that experience through the process of selecting and ordering significant details. The position of the writer as observer, or spectator, to continue to use Britton's terminology, is not a passive one. As Britton writes, the spectator role is "detached only in the technical sense that the spectator is not interfering with, not participating in, the activities of which she is an observer" ("The Spectator as Theorist: A Reply," *English Education*, February, 1989).

Observational writing encompasses a wide range of writing opportunities in the school curriculum. One of the most important aspects of observational writing is its relationship to journalism. Journalistic forms, including profiles, interviews, and the reporting of events and activities, appeal to students because they are familiar and accessible "real life" writing, and their value and functions are readily apparent.

Scientific investigation, particularly, demands close observation and accurate notation. In the science classroom, students peer through a microscope, sketch the details of their observations, and then draw conclusions about the object on the slide. Students of history may view historical and current events through newscasts, docudramas, videotapes, interviews, role-playing, and newspaper accounts. Through close observation and recording, students then may determine the impact these events have had on their own lives as well as on the society they live in.

Characteristics of Observational Writing

To "see" or observe something involves much more than a sensory act and a simple translation of this act into words. It is more than simply a matter of registering messages from the sensory nerve ends. To see is to interpret, to create meaning. In a very real sense, when we look at something and talk or write about it, we are making it. We create the world before us by the choices we commit ourselves to—choices relating to purpose, audience, and point of view. Choice, then, of how we interpret what we perceive creates the world we "see."

Ambiguity is a persistent factor in seeing and writing. We choose among competing "versions" of what we observe in order to make sense out of our observations. The things we observe will rarely tell us how to interpret, to value, to make significant. Through practice in observing and writing down our observations, we can begin to learn to make choices and to help our students make choices. Through writing, we can begin to accept responsibility for the consequences of our choices.

We confront the world with certain limitations. We have been schooled to see only in certain ways; we have learned to select and to edit experiences and quite unconsciously to limit our vision. More than that, our nervous system itself is an editing process that selects for us, whether we like it or not, what we think we "see."

A movie camera pointed at a scene films everything within the vision of the eye of the lens. A director may take the camera, step back and pan the scene, zoom in on a detail, shift to a different angle, or adjust the lighting to create an effect or convey a purpose. The camera is the observing eye. The observational writer is the movie director, a camera with consciousness.

What do we do in the face of a scene that stands before our eyes; how do we render an experience of this thing in words? What do we choose to look at? What do we consider important or significant? These are some choices the observational writer must make.

Furthermore, skilled observational writers may change their focus as they change their stance; for them the terms and tone and point of view of the historian and the scientist and the poet are all available ways of ordering a world.

Specific Criteria

Observational writing succeeds on the basis of how well the writer re-creates a particular experience of "seeing" for the reader. The successful observational writer (1) identifies the subject of the observation; (2) assumes an observational stance or point of view; (3) provides the reader with the context for the observation; and (4) presents the actual experience of seeing.

Identification of Subject. Writers clearly identify what they have observed, the subject of the observation, describing only those features that are relevant to the writer's purpose.

Point of View of Observational Stance. Writers convey their observational stance through their focus and point of view, by the details they select, and by the words they use to present their observations to the reader.

Context of Observation. Writers locate the subject of the observation in a specific place and time, as fully as necessary, to convey their perceptions.

Presentation of Observational Experience. Writers re-create their observations by selecting and ordering details, using factual descriptions as well as other strategies such as dialogue; concrete, sensory language; narration of event; and shifts between closeups and distant views.

Exemplary Student Essay

This student essay is the final draft of an assignment that is described in detail in the next section, "One Student's Writing Process." The writing steps that led up to this essay are reproduced in that section as well. The notes in brackets highlight aspects of this essay that reflect the characteristics of observational writing.

Where Houses Climb the Hills

by Todd Goodsell

In the Northern end of the city of Ventura, where houses climb the metaphorical hills, there is a rather large house. A steep, narrow, asphalt gravel road winds through hills, trees, and other secluded houses to reach it. Were you to make the trip, you would know you are nearly there when you see the avocado trees. They are shaped like domes, enormously thick trunks giving rise to a hemisphere of leaves concealing a hidden world. They must have been there for decades to grow so large. If you don't make the last right turn in the road, you will end up in the driveway of my grandfather's house.

[Precise locational language interwoven with imagery; subject identified as *house* in first sentence; invites reader to make this trip, too; sense of hidden wonder hints at childhood memories. This observation is clearly located now; the house is identified as the writer's grandfather's house; the point of view becomes clear.]

The pale blue garage and the rest of the house crouching behind it extend toward the north, where that road disappears over a ridge. A wooden wall with two doors at its north and south ends stands perpendicular to the garage door—from the far corner of the garage south to the end of baranca. Immediately beyond that, the ground drops, covered with disarranged vegetation, into what is called the baranca, one of many small, uninhabitable canyons urbanization left to nature. But that is my grownup self speaking now. As a child, I was drawn to the baranca, yet too fearful to explore its dark caverns. This particular baranca also stretches along the west side of the property, but because of the taller, old, red wall, it can't be viewed from the driveway.

[Again, precise details are enhanced by metaphorical language. Details of house and property are concretely presented. Point of view is defined by geography.]

On a clear day, like today, one can see all of the way to the Pacific Ocean. Though it is many miles away, ocean breezes rush up the canyon, leaving the air with a fresh, slightly salty smell.

[Eyewitness experience clarified. Sensory details—vision, smell.]

On this trip, this sojourn into memory, the house stands as it always did, heavy with the promise of the magical world of grandparents—no rules, old stories, chocolate cake, and hours and hours to just be.

[The writer never invites the reader into the house; it remains, like the avocado trees, like the baranca, "heavy with promise."]

I won't be making this trip again, two hours on a southern California freeway in the middle of the night, blackened hills and trees standing as silent sentinels along our path, only to arrive after an eternity to the house at the end of the road in the northern end of the city of Ventura, where houses climb the hills.

[In earlier drafts (see "One Student's Writing Process"), the writer tells the reader that his grandparents no longer live in this house; in this final version, we are left with the mystery, with the re-creation of a close observation, a childhood memory, with what the writer, too, is left with.]

One Student's Writing Process

In this section, we will follow Todd Goodsell's process in writing the preceding exemplary essay. In the unit from which this assignment is taken, all of the activities were coordinated by their close attention to observations of *place.*

The writing assignment began after the class had read Kafka's *The Metamorphosis,* with student drawings of Gregor Samsa's room as it appeared in the story. Students wrote descriptions of the room, compared their drawings to the text,

then drew conclusions about how Kafka's physical description of the room revealed Gregor's personality, mood, plot, or the author's intent.

The teacher followed this activity with a campus observation assignment; students were given a specific location on campus and asked to keep a dialectical journal of their observations.

Dialectical Journal

Students were directed as follows:

> Draw a line down the center of your page. Title the left-hand side "Details of my observation." On that side, list or cluster details of your observation. Title the right-hand side "Responses to my observation." On that side, you may include any kind of response—what you have learned, what you think or feel, or questions raised by the observation.

Quickwrite

Using the dialectical response logs, students were asked to do a "quickwrite," a short, exploratory piece of writing intended to stimulate further thoughts about a subject. After the quickwrite, they looked for a pattern in their thinking, a point of interest, or a focus for a more substantial piece of writing about the subject.

The Writing Assignment

"Write about a place where you feel comfortable. Describe the place and help your readers understand, through your choice of details, how you feel when you are there."

Note: Although observational writing is usually written from firsthand, immediate observations, the teacher chose this particular assignment in order to acquaint students with the testing situation, in which students must re-create a remembered experience.

This is the point at which we begin to follow one student through the remaining steps in the unit assignment. These steps are listed here for your reference as you read through the student's work.

Step 1. Brainstorming, clustering, listing. Students brainstorm places where they feel comfortable.

Step 2.* Quickwrite. Students write for 10 minutes about their place and share this writing with a partner.

Step 3.* Writing first draft. After reflecting on their cluster and quickwrite ideas and discussing their ideas with a partner, students write a first draft.

Step 4.* Responding to first draft. The teacher works with the entire class to elicit the characteristics of successful observational writing. Then, working in groups, students write responses to each other's papers.

Step 5. Writing a second draft. Students write a second draft, using the responses from the groups as well as teacher consultation to help them revise. In this type of writing, students are chiefly concerned with strengthening aspects basic to the rhetorical effectiveness of observational writing—establishing the subject clearly, conveying their point of view, providing context, and, most importantly, presenting the actual experience of the observation. (See the section "Prewriting Strategies and Response and Revision" for extended suggestions on revision of this type of writing.)

Step 6.* Writing final draft. After sharing their second drafts with other members of their writing groups, students do the final editing and submit their papers to the class library of students' work. This version of one student's writing process appears as an exemplary student essay in the previous section.

One Student's Responses to the Steps of the Assignment

Step 2. Grandparent's House – Quickwrite

Kitchen table, waffle irons, green rug in living room, stuffed dolls, lawn pictures, train set, genealogy room, temporary addition, sunflower, zucchinis, pool, library, laundry chute, dark room, food storage, TV room—window (see feet), sewing room, cookies as left, shovel, rattlesnake, homemade ice cream, shop (workshop), deer, sleeping bags, Easter, egg hunt, basket, Grandmother, sick, heart attack, living room couch, glass coffee table, Swedish pancakes, dress/skirt, money, hem of dress, spool.

* This step is printed in this guide.

Step 3. Writing first draft

Two hours on southern California freeways in the middle of the night certainly is no joyride. Five other bodies at close proximity along with unnumbered baggage in the same vehicle don't combine to make the journey any more pleasant. All hope to "sit by the window." From there one can gaze out at other sets of headlights and taillights rushing to and fro in a steady stream, or at the blackened hills and trees standing as silent sentinels along our path, or at many a passive advertisement rudely breaking the moment to proclaim a nonpassive ware or service.

You see, in the northern end of the city of Ventura, where houses climb the hills, there stands our destination, a rather large house. Arrival makes all the pains and discomforts of getting there worth it. A steep, narrow, asphalt and gravel road winds through hills, trees and other secluded houses, and we must follow it to reach there. Were you to make the trip, and were it to be during daylight hours, you could know you are nearly there when you see the avocado trees. They must have been there for decades to grow so large. Don't make that last right turn, and you will end up in the driveway of my grandparents' house.

Though their exact colors cannot be discerned well in the night, the pale blue garage and the rest of the house crouching behind it can be seen extending toward the north, where the entry road disappears over a ridge. A wooden wall stands perpendicular to the garage door from the far corner of the garage south to the edge of the baranca. From there a short retaining wall of similar make terminates the southern end of the property. Immediately beyond that, the ground drops, covered with disarranged vegetation, into what we called the baranca, one of many small, uninhabitable canyons urbanization left to nature. This particular baranca also stretches along the west side of the property, but because of the taller, old, red wall it cannot be viewed well from the driveway, especially now, at night.

On a clear day one can see all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Though it is many miles away, ocean breezes rush up the canyon, sometimes leaving the air with a fresh, slightly salty smell.

I have visited this place many times. Until about four years ago it was the house my grandparents lived in all of my life. This and the property's unique characteristics make it a familiarly comfortable place for me, but don't bother me with that now, so late at night. Just tell me where I can go to bed. Details can wait until dawn.

Step 4. Student Responses to the First Draft (Students' responses relate to the characteristics of observational writing—subject, stance, context, and presentation.)

Student No. 1:

1. *The subject is the house; Todd makes that very clear.*
2. *Todd's point of view is very clear to me; he is taking the reader back with him on a particular trip to see his grandparent's house.*
3. *The context is full of details—what you can see from all around the house. And driving up to it.*
4. *I think I can see this house pretty much through Todd's eyes. He does a good job of using details. We don't get inside, but I think he wanted us to see the approach and maybe get at how he felt as he was getting there.*

Student No. 2:

1. *The subject seemed to be the house, but you need to narrow it down to not the wall, the garden next to it, the garage, etc., but some or a few aspects which make you feel at home there. That feeling isn't made clear through your description.*
2. *Your point of view I didn't quite get because you covered so much and left me unsure whether you were looking at the house as it is or as it was, or as you are or were. Now I'm getting fuzzy.*
3. *Well, the context seems pretty full, fuller than the subject, if the subject is the house. Or is the subject getting to the house? In that case, everything I said before—just forget it. Everything's okay if that's it. But I am not sure so I guess you better do something about what is your subject. (This should be under #1.)*
4. *I don't know what else to say that I haven't covered. But I really liked the language you used to describe things, like the "sentinels." That's good. I think you covered the whole experience of getting there very well, now that I've figured out what you were doing.*

Note: The student's final draft appears in the previous section as an exemplary student essay. You can see that Todd used his writing group's responses in his revision, making it a much stronger observational writing essay.

Prewriting Strategies and Response and Revision

Observational writing often follows a sequence that moves through a number of distinct stages: identifying a subject; drawing, note-taking or note-gathering; reviewing one's observations alone or sharing them with others; drafting a piece of writing with particular readers in

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mind; working with the draft in a response group; and finally, re-drafting the piece in a form suitable for the writer's choice of audience. The different stages in this process open up many possibilities for helpful response and purposeful revision.

Suggestions for Response at the Note-taking Stage

Students share notes from logs, journals or other exploratory kinds of note taking with a partner or small group for help in discovering the strengths of the observation. Students can be directed to comment on many things:

- Specific naming of places, objects, people
- Important descriptive details
- A possible idea to explore further
- Selection of a point of view

At this point, personal response to one's own notes can also work well:

- Learning logs – Students list what they've learned from their observations, noting those they may want to focus on.
- Dialectical journals – On the left-hand side of a page, students list their observations. On the right-hand side they write out their responses to the observations.

Discussing and Planning for the First Draft with Response Group or Partner

At this stage the proposed writing is still tentative. Most writers need to sift through voluminous notes, selecting and weighing their data carefully as they decide what they want to say and how to say it. Talking with other students about key questions can help them shape their ideas as they begin drafting:

- What do I want to convey to my readers about my subject? What impression or point of view do I want to make?
- What have I learned about my subject?

Keeping in mind that the best observational writing conveys the particular stance of the writer toward the subject, attention to audience is crucial for writers of observation. They need to know what is working and what isn't. Writers need to know whether or not they have succeeded in what they set out to do. Some responses may prompt writers to return to the site of their original observation for more information, to try to re-create mental images to recall additional specific details, or to use their data more effectively.

Response Group Work After the Completion of a First Draft

After completing a first draft, students can look more closely at areas of strengths and weaknesses to help focus possible revisions. Here students can work with partners or response group members in looking at specific strategies within each of the characteristics of observational writing. One response group guide is presented here. As observational writing covers so many different kinds of situations, these suggestions could easily be reworked and focused for particular assignments. Students or teachers may select appropriate questions for each of the four characteristics.

Student Response Guide

In your own words identify exactly what or who the subject of the observation is. Try to draw or sketch the subject of the observation as you think the writer saw it. Your sketch will help the writer see whether the written words convey the actual experience. Discuss your drawing with the writer to help clarify any misconceptions.

Observational Stance

What is the writer's point of view? Is it the same point of view throughout the paper or does it shift? Tell the writer whether you could follow the point of view easily. If you could not, show the writer where you had trouble.

What feelings toward the subject does the writer convey? How did you decide how the writer felt about the subject? Try to write one sentence stating your ideas about the writer's feelings. Pick out some specific examples of words, phrases, or sentences that give you information about the writer's feelings.

From looking at the subject of this observation through the writer's eyes, what insights, if any, did you have? Pick out any sections that make this writer's point of view special or unusual. If you could not find any, help the writer see how his or her observations are unique.

Context of Observation

What was the context for this writer's observation? Pick out those passages that show the location for the observation. Tell the writer whether you need more information about the location and time. When did this observation take place? If it is important, look for the season or time of day.

Presentation of Observational Experience

What factual descriptions does the writer include? Do you need any additional facts to see the subject? Give examples of concrete language (specific words that convey sensory details) that the writer used. Show the writer places where additional details would be helpful to you in seeing the subject as he or she saw it.

Look for shifts between closeups and distant views. If the writer has included only one view, see whether you could suggest places for another.

If the writer has used dialogue, tell whether it was helpful in presenting the subject, scene, or activity to you. If dialogue could be used more effectively, show the writer how.

What other strategies has this writer used to re-create the experience? Let the writer know how successful the essay is and where it might be changed to help you as the reader see more clearly.

Classroom Writing Assignments

Because observational writing assignments involve looking around the school or going out into a natural environment or the community, these assignments help students learn habits of observing, strategies of note-taking, and writing from notes—skills that will be invaluable to them in many areas of their lives. Appropriate assignments range from brief observational exercises to extended interview, profile, or Ken Macrorie's I-Search assignments. (Ken Macrorie, *The I-Search Paper*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton Cook Publishers/Heinemann, 1988.) For exercises, teachers might consult George Hillocks' *Observing and Writing* (National Council of Teachers of English, 1975). James Moffett in *Active Voice* and *Active Voices III* (Boynton Cook/Heinemann, 1981, 1987) outlines a range of essay and profile assignments, along with examples of student writing, in sections called *composed observation, eyewitness memoir* (human and nature subjects), and *reporter-at-large*.

Observational writing assignments help students focus their attention, train their perception, record their observations, and draw inferences or conclusions from their records. Actually having students draw what they see is an excellent way to help them train their perception. Assignments that involve sensory descriptions lead directly to observational writing. Although the term *observational* implies the sense of sight, observational writing should be thought of as embracing all of the senses; hence, an assignment involving the perception of sound, taste, or smell is an appropriate prewriting activity for this type of writing.

Suggested classroom writing assignments that follow are arranged by subject area categories.

A Unit Assignment Integrating Literature and Observational Writing.

Note: This assignment is abridged from the "Fieldnotes" section of a forthcoming textbook series to be published by Boynton Cook Publishers/Heinemann.

Bring to class several pears, if they are in season, or, if not, a photograph or a still life including several pears. Have students, in small groups, brainstorm or cluster words, phrases, or associations related to the pears they are observing. Ask one person from each group to report to the class, and have one student at the board or an overhead projector record class responses in three categories: (1) physically descriptive words; (2) comparisons with other things, expressed as metaphors; and (3) associations, either personal or general.

Using only categories 1 and 2 from the class list as reference, each student writes a short poem or prose piece describing the pears he or she has observed. At the end, each student writes a very brief statement containing some aspect from category 3. Students can then, again in their small groups, share their writings, noting the similarities that arise from their common experience and the differences that point to the uniqueness of their own perceptions.

Following this activity, hand out copies of Wallace Stevens's "Study of Two Pears" and read it aloud. Arrange to have the class hear it aloud several times, perhaps asking different groups to read different stanzas or asking several students to read. The object is to hear the poem

in different voices and to let the images become firmly fixed in the hearers' minds.

Study of Two Pears[1]
by Wallace Stevens

I
Opusculum paedagogum.
The pears are not viols,
Nudes or bottles.
They resemble nothing else.

II
They are yellow forms
Composed of curves
Bulging toward the base.
They are touched red.

III
They are not flat surfaces
Having curved outlines.
They are round
Tapering toward the top.

IV
In the way they are modelled.
There are bits of blue.
A hard dry leaf hangs
From the stem.

V
The yellow glistens.
It glistens with various yellows,
Citrons, oranges and greens
Flowering over the skin.

VI
The shadows of the pears
Are blobs on the green cloth.
The pears are not seen
As the observer wills.

Group discussion might follow a number of paths: students might first attempt to draw Stevens's pears, comparing them with the pears they observed; they might compare their descriptive words and phrases with those in the poem. They might look up the scientific name of the pears—Bosc, Bartlett, or Winter Nells? Then they might turn to the last two lines and discuss what they can make of this conclusion.

The next phase of the assignment is to ask students to go out into the field for individual, close examination of a plant or animal. Have students select something that they can observe over a period of time, at least three observations over a week, for example. Students should record their observations in a dialectical journal, writing precise descriptions of the plant or animal (size, color, habits of movement, changes) on the left side with metaphorical descriptions and personal associations on the right. On each occasion, they should sketch the plant or animal, observing any changes from the previous visit.

After the field observations are completed, students are ready to write an observational poem or essay about their observations, depending on their ultimate purpose for writing. The purpose may be simply for the personal pleasure of transforming one's collection of data, the field notes, into a coherent preservation of a unique perception. On the other hand, the purpose may be for one to record, along with other members of the class, observations of plants and animals in the immediate environment. Whether the purpose is *transactional*, that is, to transmit information to others, or *poetic*, to compose a piece of prose or a poem that is aesthetically pleasing, the process of obtaining the data is that of the careful observer. The scientist and the poet share the observing eye.

Observational Writing Assignments in English-Language Arts

Opportunities for assignments in observational writing in the English class range from literature-based activities, such as the "Two Pears" assignment, to interviews, profiles, the I-Search paper, and saturation reporting. They arise in any activity that requires sensory description or focuses on one individual's perception. Many possibilities for helping students develop their ability to articulate their perceptions for specific readers will emerge as teachers continue to develop more intricately interwoven curriculum designs. Transactions between readers and texts—both literary and life texts—rooted in observational writing may stand as ends in themselves or become the bases for other kinds of writing. Some possibilities for such assignments follow.

Classroom Interviews. Each student interviews and introduces a classmate to the rest of the class, focusing on what makes that student unique. Each then writes up his or her interview as a profile.

[1]Wallace Stevens, "Study of Two Pears," in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1965, pp. 196–197.

Interviews Outside the Classroom. These interviews and their write-ups provide students with opportunities to see family, friends, and others in a new light, by eliciting interesting and unusual information, such as the following:

- Experience of historical events like the Great Depression, World War I, or World War II
- Knowledge of life skills of another region or era
- Expertise in areas such as car repairing, cake decorating, or home nursing
- An unusual hobby such as falconry or kite flying

The interview can also bring students into contact with members of the community. Possibilities include the following:

- Elected officials
- Community workers – police officers, mail carriers, volunteers
- Business people, such as the president of the local Chamber of Commerce
- Professionals – accountants, orthodontists, clergy, school administrators
- Someone engaged in the career the student wishes to follow

Observations Behind the Scenes. Although writing about a performance, such as a play, recital, or concert, may be an evaluative essay, going behind the scenes at one of these events can be the basis for observational writing. Opportunities for this kind of writing include the following:

- Backstage at a school play or one performed by a professional or little theater group
- The "forming up" area for a marching band revue or parade
- The area where animals are prepared for exhibition at a fair or a dog or cat show
- Backstage at a dance recital presented by a local dancing school

Observations of a Place. Possibilities of writing include the following:

- Campus locations, such as the cafeteria, principal's office, various classrooms, and gym
- Grocery stores, both supermarkets and "mom and pop" stores
- Doctors' offices, medical clinics, and hospital emergency rooms
- Bus stations and airports
- A "soup kitchen"
- A senior citizens' center
- A preschool or day-care center
- A courtroom
- An auction

Literature-based Assignments. After reading a poem, essay, or section from a novel or short story based on close observation, ask students to write a similar piece based on their own firsthand or recalled experiences.

- Have students select a scene from a work of drama or fiction, adopt the persona of a character from the work, and write a "firsthand" observation as that character would perceive the scene. The scene may be a static description or an event that is portrayed in the work. It is revealing to have the observation of this scene written from the persona of one of the minor characters.
- Encourage students to include their own firsthand observations of people, scenes, and places in original short stories.

Observational Writing Assignments in Science

As close observation is fundamental to the behavior of a scientist, observational writing assignments are natural in many subjects within the broad discipline of science. Trips to study plants or animals in their natural habitats may lead to very precise observational essays describing how the students have perceived their subjects. Laboratory experiments are traditionally recorded in science classes. Turning these reports into essays would be a natural next step.

Examples of such activities include:

- Have students keep logs of a field trip to study tide pools. On their return to the classroom, ask them to write an essay on one of their observations.
- After showing a film depicting the circulatory system of the human body, ask students to write an essay on what they observed as they watched the film.
- Ask students to study the natural environment of the school campus, noting the kinds

of animal and plant life that it sustains. Then ask them to write an essay in which they convey their perception of the life, other than student life, that exists in their school world.

Observational Writing Assignments in History–Social Science

Writing assignments for history–social studies/government may be based on the actual observation of an event or on the review of historical data about the event. Assignments about historical events can require invented rather than actually observed information, asking students to adopt a persona and write an observation from the adopted persona's point of view. Such assignments would best be given immediately following the experience of a vivid re-creation of the scene to be "observed" through film, drama, or eyewitness accounts.

Examples of observational writing in history/social studies include:

- Attend a meeting of an elected body, such as a school board or a city council, and write a description of that visit.
- Have students study a historical event and write about that event from a particular viewpoint or from various viewpoints. Use of the atomic bomb against Japan, for instance, might be described in diary entries written by President Truman, Emperor Hirohito, or the mother of an American serviceman. The desegregation of buses in the South could be described from the viewpoints of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., a white secretary who rides the bus to work each day, or a Supreme Court justice.

Observational Writing Assignments in Health and Physical Education

In physical education classes, students can work in groups or pairs to help improve a particular skill, such as a serve in tennis or volleyball, free throws or lay-ups in basketball, or catching and throwing in softball. One or two students, as necessary, perform the action while another student watches and carefully makes notes on every motion. Using these notes to become aware of exactly how he or she is executing the action can help the student improve his or her performance.

Students can create a log of individual health habits. Using themselves, family members, or friends as subjects, students can record the daily behaviors that enhance or detract from well-being. Observation might include eating habits, amount and kind of exercise, and sleep patterns. Once notes have been kept for a period of several days, they can be written into an observational essay, with recommendations for improved health habits.

The health care field provides many subjects for interviews with professionals that may prove valuable to students in this area of study. Medical doctors, chiropractors, dentists, orthodontists, nurses, dental technicians, and lab technicians could all provide insight into and information about health and health care. Students might work together to compile a rich source of observational essays for the school library or career center.

Additional Exemplary Student Essays

The following essays represent papers written under a variety of conditions: "Interview with a Fisherman" is part of a saturation report involving a series of interviews that ultimately were collected into a finished work. "Observation: A Record Store" was written during two intensive writing workshops held a week apart; the first workshop involved on-the-scene observations and note-taking, while the second involved drafting, working with response groups, and revising. The last three examples of exemplary student observational writing are all taken from *Active Voices III*, the collection of high school writing edited by James Moffett and published by Boynton Cook.

Interview with a Fisherman

by Don Carpenter

The gleam in his eye and the serious, yet broad grin on his face told me that he was in his element. Within no more than five minutes of our arrival, Doug Nordby had his line in the water, and was giving me advice on just what to do. Standing in the middle of the creek, he looked like a seasoned pro. His fishing vest was weighted down with the basic necessities; his net was slung across his back, and he wore the most unusual pair of self-described "fishing tennis shoes." In reality, they were a converted pair of tennis shoes. Carpet lined the soles and he said that they give "extra grip for walking on the slippery, moss covered rocks that line most creek beds.

"You can't let the fish know that you're there, so be quiet and stay out of their view as much as possible. If you can present your bait in a natural way, they'll bite. Now watch (he demonstrates). Let your bait drift in with the current, and never can you let your sinker touch the bottom. If you do, you're sure to get snagged, and you can kiss off that particular hole. Control the direction and speed of the line with your left hand, and maneuver it under overhanging rocks. Fish love to stay out of the direct current, and therefore they hide out in the eddies created by the larger rocks in the creek."

"Do you set the hook or do you simply reel in when you get a bite? You make everything sound so easy. Like catching fish is as simple as 1,2,3. How does a beginner start."

"Everyone can catch fish. There is no mystery behind it. Patience is the key word. One must be prepared to get skunked. When I go fishing, the fish are a bonus. Fishing is an excuse for me to get outdoors. Sure it's nice to limit out on twenty-inch browns, but it is that concept of getting back to nature that keeps me coming back for more and more. As in any sport or event, skill comes with practice, and I've been fishing since I wasn't but four or five years of age. Anyone with the desire to catch a fish will. It may take a while, through trial and error, but it is that driving force and determination to catch just one more that keeps most people fishing. The only instruction I ever received was on the back porch of my grandfather's summer cabin. Even then the concepts of catching fish and having fun were clear to me."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are a self-taught fisherman?"

"That is not at all what I am trying to say. In my entire family, my grandfather and I are the only ones who ever fished, and when he passed away, my source of wisdom was stunted. I started checking out old-time fishing magazines and books out from the library. It is there that I learned to tie all the fancy knots and what types of baits to use in what climates and situations. On TV these days they've got several good fishing shows. I can only find them on Sunday afternoons if I'm lucky. Did you see Marty Stouffer's "Wild America" the other day?"

"No. Why? Did they do a show on fish?"

"They did a story on the cutthroat trout of Yellowstone National Forest. He backed up all of my beliefs about fish and their eating habitats. Now there is an educational show. I guess I'm just attracted to the outdoors. For as long as I can remember I've been watching Mutual of Omaha's 'Wild Kingdom', and all of those National Geographic specials on Channel Nine."

"Have you been able to receive any support from your parents in your outdoors interests? Or have your interests been kindled by your own love for adventure?"

"You've hit it right in the nose. Fishing is an adventure, and what more can a young outdoorsman ask for than an outdoor adventure. Every time I go fishing it is an adventure. It can be on a creek I've fished a hundred times, but with every step I uncover a new mystery. I'll discover a new wildflower, or notice different markings on a tree, or admire the delicacy of a newly spun spider web. There is no end to the variations of life available to anyone willing to look. Over the years, my parents have shown me some support, but it is minimal as compared to the time I'm going to spend with my children. I'm going to make sure that their every interest is developed to the fullest. Anyone can be anything and everyone is going to be someone, so you've got to experience as much as possible before you make a career decision."

"What do you think the future has in store for you? Will you be able to uphold your intimacy with the outdoors or will all that be lost as you go away to school."

"All my life I've been batting career ideas around. When I was really young I wanted to be a Playboy photographer, and then I thought I liked the idea of being a bush pilot. There was too much danger involved there, so as it looks right now, I think I'm going to be a river guide with a friend during the summers that I am going to school. I have wanted to start my own river raft company for almost a year now. Last summer I went on a six day river raft trip in Idaho, and I fell in love instantly with the working atmosphere. Now that is a job made in heaven. For an entire summer, the owner of a river raft company grosses over $150,000. I know that there is a lot of hard work involved, but the rewards, (not just the money) outweigh the hardships by a long shot. It is like spending the entire summer on a working vacation."

Observational writing includes the careful recording of an interview. In the first paragraph of "Interview with a Fisherman," Don Carpenter sets the scene with a brief description of his subject, Doug Nordby. He then devotes the rest of his paper to an edited version of the conversation. In this next example, the observational focus is on careful listening rather than seeing.

Observation: A Record Store

by Saundra Lee

In spite of music's incredible diversity it is still stereotyped by people. Comments like "Madonna's for wanna-be's" and "The Scorpions are for headbangers" are common among teens but this bias has spread to the record stores as well. Sales clerks ridicule your choices: "God forbid anyone should listen to the Bee Gees!" Yet one store has remained unscathed from this pettiness: Blue Meannie Records, a store whose main concerns are providing all types of music and, as I learned, not stereotyping anyone!

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The building itself is a tribute to the differentiated styles that are represented in music. Vibrant colors, reminiscent of the 60's psychedelia are used in caricatures of groups and musicians on the building's surface. David Bowie in his resplendent orange wig, Jim Hendrix and his incredible guitar and leather- clad Nikki Sixx of Motley Dove are just a few of the artists in the store's painted mosaic. Posters promoting various albums and concert tours line the windows and neon lights blink incessantly, alternately illuminating one poster and shadowing another. "Yeah," remarked one shopper as he entered the store, "the walls of this place represent an incredible history of music."

The inside of the store is decorated in typical music-store fashion: racks of records and music posters slathered over every available space, even counters! But as my eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, I found a jacket worn by one of the Beatles in the Sgt. Pepper movie on the wall, its gold arm braid still glittering as it must have when perhaps Paul McCartney or John Lennon wore it in front of the cameras. Dolls of the group KISS, a popular 70's metal act were posed on the counter by the register. And dangling from the ceiling was a doll of the Blue Meannie (hence the store's name), a character made popular by the Beatles in the film Yellow Submarine. *Clearly, this was no ordinary store!*

I think it was a salesman who said "How's it goin'?" to me when I walked through the turnstile but I couldn't be sure. He reminded me of a biker—long scraggly hair and beard with a black T-shirt stretched over a round belly. But then he asked, "Lookin' for somethin' in particular?"

I started feeling apprehensive and I winced as I responded, "Yeah, I'm looking for Duran Duran stuff" in a weak voice. Now the response I was accustomed to was a sneer and a disdainful "OK" as the clerk walks away from me because Duran isn't considered "real" music by most people's standards. But this man launched into a catalogue of Duran products that the store had! In the midst of our discussion, a skinhead wearing a skull and crossbones t-shirt and various metal studs and chains approached us. "Duran? There's a great mix of "Girls on Film" on the rack," he commented. "But if you find it, the 12-inch of "Wild Boys" is really good." Somehow in my stupor, I managed to thank them and I marvelled at the skinhead's knowledge of a "trendy poser" group.

As I flipped through the "D" bin, a guy walked over to me. "Don't cha love this place?" he grinned. He had overheard the conversation with the two men and patted my back. "They're neat people here," he commented. "They don't care what music you like just as long as you enjoy it." I stared at him, stunned. I had gotten so accustomed to the typical unsocial attitudes of fellow customers that I was flabbergasted at this display of cordiality. A hippy on the other side of my rack laughed at my response then sighed. "This place, is like, a shrine to music," he said, pausing for effect. He gave me a peace sign (two fingers in a V) as he walked away.

I found some albums that interested me and went to pay for them. The clerk was still chatting with the skinhead but he stopped when he saw me approach. "You found the stuff you like?" he asked as he rang up my purchases. The skinhead observed then gave me a thumbs-up sign when he saw the "Wild Boys" remix in my pile. As I turned to leave, the clerk called out" Thanks for comin' in! I hope you like your new platters!"

As I reflect on my shopping spree, one thing is clear. I went into that place expecting it to be like any other record store. I judged the people by their dress and expected antisocial attitudes. Maybe that's why I found Blue Meannie so appealing because it contradicted all my preconceived notions. Blue Meannie is indeed a music store, *and one I've decided to frequent more often! A musician once said that "music is the only international language in the world." Well, thanks, Blue Meannie, for translating it for me!*

Saundra Lee's observations of a visit to a record store are framed by paragraphs that make generalizations about music and people. The first paragraph sets up her experience in one particular store. The heart of the essay records her careful observations of the building, its decorative posters, the salespeople, and the people she met there. Although Saundra Lee is part of this experience, she maintains an observer's stance, recording her own responses as well as her observations of others. The final paragraph is reflective; it is not observation itself, but is based on her observations. As explained in the introduction to this guide, observation is a foundational kind of writing and frequently leads to a writer's reflections on the observation. Such a paper should be assessed on the quality of the observation included, not penalized for using the observations as a springboard for reflection. The key is the focus; here, the focus is clearly on the writer's observations.

Snake[2]

by Peter Nicholson

I crouch beneath the cool, green camellia bush. My hand relaxes, and from it slips the hot trash bag into which I had been stuffing damp, withered blossoms. Sunlight drops through the camellia's waxy leaves, splinters through my hair onto my cheeks. Silence. The sweet, cloying aroma of the fallen blossoms

[2]Peter Nicholson, "Snake" in *Active Voices III*. Edited by James Moffett. Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1987, p. 82.

hangs in the air, mixing with the dry smell of the hot earth. Rustle of dead leaves. Without moving my head, my eyes run over the ground across ivy, stones, twigs—there.

A shape as still as a twig, but rounded, full, living. It is a garter snake, poised with its head above the ivy in a puddle of sunlight. Ebony, coral and maize, it rests immobile. Flick. Its pink tongue darts out and back in a motionless mouth. I lick my parched lips, working my tongue slowly over their salty, chapped curves. My eyes follow the curve of its body trying to find its end, but once it dips below the ivy I am lost. The snake pivots its head, and I stop thinking. Quickly, it drops to the ground and slithers through the ivy. I stand up and look down at where it should be, but it isn't. I prod the leaves with my foot, but there is no answering movement.

Under the Sun[3]

by Julie Kenaston

The long, rectangular loft was close to half-filled with hay. Fine fragments from the bales explode in clouds of dust at each footstep, giving rise to a dry, musty smell. Crevices between the thick, splintering floorboards are filled with stale, acrid hay and dust; bits of bailing twine lie on the floor among the loose hay. The tin barn roof magnifies each sound, especially the moaning of the sultry wind coming through the broad opening that overlooks the sun-dried pastures. The slight breeze does nothing to relieve the stifling heat of the loft but brings on a scent of the parched grass, and sere, humid air.

The cracked ground is fervid to the touch; the insipid grass, brittle; and yellow star thistles line the fences, thriving in the scorching rays of the intense summer day. Killdeer rove feverishly under the hot sun, and horses pace impatiently, heads hung low, dehydrating in their thick fur. Some chickens, feathers puffed, squawk pitifully as they traipse discontentedly to the water tub in hopes that the cool liquid will assuage their parched throats. An enormous pile of dirt clods and manure interrupt the barren scene, the lumps slowly crumbling away in the afternoon warmth. Sheep roam the field continuously, discontentedly bleating their protest of the heat to the flaming ball of fire above.

As the Tide Rises[4]

by Anthony Randall

The water slowly climbs up the shore as the giant, yellow sun settles into the far, green water. The green waves dance up and down on its face as if trying to extinguish it. The long brown beach stretches for miles in each direction then slowly slopes to the horizon. Pieces of driftwood are carelessly littered up and down the beach front.

A sand crab's tracks lead wobbly to a shallow but spacious tide pool. The little rock ledges contain a small portion of a captured tide from the high noon waters. The rock ledges contain small cracks with all sorts of little sea creatures in them, most of them so small that they must remain in hiding for fear of being eaten by a bird. On one ledge are tracks from a bird who was trying to get a free and easy meal by eating the small animals or the little portions of broken off seaweed that float in the pool.

On the bottom of the shallow pool a snail shell moves at a pace above that of a normal snail. It stops in front of a small green plant. Slowly a crablike creature appears from within the shell and gobbles up the plant. The moment the plant is eaten the hermit crab dashes back to his home. Another snail shell moves along a little rock ledge, but this time it is being pushed by its original owner.

There are two sea anemones in this pool, one on each side. They face each other as if preparing for the last showdown. Their tentacles flow back and forth with the wind-caused currents, always in a hopeful search for unsuspecting prey. A piece of a dead plant comes swirling by and is immediately sucked up and surrounded by the tentacles before being drawn into the mouth.

In the most remote corner lies a dark shape, as if in hiding from an unknown enemy. In the light this creature would prove to be very colorful but not very active. It is the sunflower star, one of the biggest and most beautiful of the sunflowers. It has anywhere from nineteen arms and can grow to over two feet in diameter. This one has about twelve arms and is about one-half foot in diameter.

Out of the water on one side of the tiny pool lies a small mussel shell. Its purple- and white-streaked cover is hard and dry because of its long disuse. Once this shell was a home and a source of great protection for the small yellow mussel. Now it is a piece of ocean debris, waiting for the next tide to ride it higher onto the rocky seashore.

On the higher rocks of the pool walls are quite a few barnacles. Most of them sit half submerged in water and half drying in the ocean air. The larger specimens that cling to the upper surrounding rocks are sharp and will easily cut anything that comes in contact with them. These barnacles range in color from a light brown to a light orange. You will find barnacles hooked to a lot of things but most frequently to the rocks and mussel shells that lie in or near the tide pool.

Out of one of the large cracks slides a yellow prawn on its way to dine on the smaller animals who inhabit this temporary home. Its feathery gills move back and forth as if in a giant wind. The prawn slowly crawls one way and quickly darts back across

[3]Julie Kenaston (Torsen), "Under the Sun" in *Active Voices III*, p. 86.

[4]Anthony Randall, "As the Tide Rises," in *Active Voices III*, pp. 83–84.

the pool at an almost invisible little fish. The fish tries to get away, but the prawn grabs it in its two front claws and snaps its back. Slowly but surely the prawn makes his way back to his home and gets ready for a big dinner.

Now that the sun is setting many of the sensitive animals start to show themselves. From under one rock alone come four flat, brown ribbon worms. They crawl to and fro searching for food or some discarded material left by some other inhabitant of this home.

The last animal to see before the sun disappears is a bright purple sea urchin. Its round body is fitted almost perfectly into a hole in the rock. Its long narrow legs stretch out to find an evening meal.

Then all hopes for further discovery are over as the tide rises and sun disappears.

The Prompt Format

The writing prompts used by California's state assessment are organized into two sections: The *Writing Situation* orients students to the special writing situations unique, in this instance, to observational writing. Students are given background about the topic as well as any specific material they might need, such as a selection of literature, a photograph, or a graph. The occasion for writing is usually specified in this section, preparing students for an awareness of their intended readers. Although the kind of writing is not identified by name, it is indicated by the wording in this section. For example, in observational writing, all prompts would have a statement such as "You will want to write using precise details so that your readers will feel that they are seeing through your eyes."

In the second section, *Directions for Writing*, students are given the specifics regarding the assignment's topic, intent, potential audience, and any other pertinent information for students to keep in mind when responding to the prompt.

In this guide, the term *assignment* refers to assignments a teacher gives in the classroom, without the constraints of a testing situation, while the word *prompt* refers to the directions for a one-draft piece to be written in a prescribed time period. In observational writing, for instance, an assignment would usually require firsthand observation, notes, and several drafts and students' responses, while in a testing situation, the directions will ask for a *recalled* firsthand observation and result in a single draft.

Observational writing relies on memory or notes taken from direct observation. The journalist capturing a newsworthy event, the naturalist taking field notes, the social scientist describing events of historical significance, a student profiling people or places—all may take careful notes and depend on those notes to re-create the event for the reader. In California's testing situation, however, students are asked to recall an observed experience and present it without the benefit of firsthand observational notes. As the samples of student writing in this writing guide will show, students can succeed at writing from recalled observations, particularly if they have had previous opportunities to practice in the classroom the full range of possibilities—note-taking, drawing, drafting, sharing—that most writers make use of classroom observational writing assignments or in professional writing situations.

Guidelines for Writing Prompts for Observational Writing

Observational writing requires a student to describe a remembered scene, place, person, or event from the perspective of an observer, not a participant. The writer attempts to re-create the observation concretely and vividly so that readers can imagine it. In good school assignments, this type of writing begins with firsthand observations and on-the-spot notes in real-world writing. In a testing situation, students must rely on *remembered* observations. The prompts nevertheless enable students to demonstrate whether they are learning to present observations concretely.

Following are guidelines for drafting the writing situation and directions for writing for observational writing prompts. Sample prompts model these guidelines.

Writing Situation

Identify a particular type of person, scene, or activity and describe it for the student. In three to five sentences, orient students unmistakably to the situation, reminding them of the familiarity of the type or the frequency of observing it. (Identifying a *type* [class clown, teacher, busy place, child at play] leaves students the choice of specific scenes or people and particular occasions for observation.)

In a paragraph of two or three sentences, identify who is asking the student to write about the observation (perhaps the student's English teacher) or the source where it will be published (perhaps the school newspaper) or who will read it (perhaps other students). Ask the student to

"think about" specific occasions for observing the type and to choose one about which to write.

Directions for Writing

Begin the directions, "Write about one time [or the time] when you observed . . . ." You may want to use the words *show*, *describe*, or *present*. Mention again the reader or readers. Emphasize the importance of focusing the writing on one particular occasion of observation. Be sure to use the phrase *concrete language*. You also may want to mention *details* or *specifics*. Do not lead the student by suggesting other rhetorical features of observational writing.

Conclude the directions with a sentence or sentences beginning, "Your readers [or identify a particular reader] will want to know . . ." or "Help your readers [or a particular reader] . . . ." You may want to use the words *see* or *imagine* or the phrases "see it as you saw it" or "see how it looked to you."

Keep sentences relatively brief and vocabulary accessible. Title the prompt in a way that keeps students' focus on the writing situation.

A Memorable Person

Writing Situation. You often see interesting or unusual people around your community or in places where you have traveled. Occasionally one of those unusual people seems unforgettable. You keep thinking of this person. Maybe the person looked unusual or was doing something strange. Maybe the person seemed funny or scary. Think about the people you have seen who you think are memorable in some way.

Your English teacher has asked you to write about such a person. You may have seen this person only one time, but he or she is still remembered. You can easily recall where you saw this person and what the person was doing.

Directions for Writing. Write about an unusual person you once observed. Describe the person and what specifically made him or her memorable to you. Keep your focus on one particular time that you observed this person. Help your teacher see this person through your eyes by using concrete language. Choose specific details that will help your teacher understand how you feel about this memorable person.

Observing a Beginner

Writing Situation. It can be interesting to watch someone struggling to learn how to do something new. For example, you might have seen a person learning how to ride a bike, play a sport, cook a meal, build something, play an instrument, or learn a new skill. You could see the concentration, the frustration, and the pride that a person experiences in learning something new.

Your English teacher has asked you to write an essay about someone learning to do something new. Choose one time that you remember well, and try to recall as many details as you can.

Directions for Writing. Write about a time when you observed someone learning to do something new. You want your teacher to be able to see or imagine what you observed. Do not just tell the teacher your opinions about what you observed. Instead, use concrete language and specific details that will show your teacher how you see your subject.

Essays Written for the State Assessment

High-range Achievement

The writer of the following essay obviously delights in his command of language. His alliterative and figurative language give the paper a stylistic unity, in addition to its formal unity. The paper is an effectively detailed re-creation of a memory of a specific place: the subject is clearly identified in the first paragraph; the writer's stance is revealed not only through the details selected but also through the nature of the metaphors. The context in this paper is vividly detailed by setting the "rocky shorelines and gentle tide pools of Carmel, California," at the foot of the whole town, "a downhill slope that ends at Neptune's playground." The presentation of the experience itself is rich with concrete descriptions and metaphorical imagery. The paper is framed by the definition of *home* and a final reflective paragraph. This writer has written an exemplary paper in a very limited time.

Home, Webster's Third Definition

Home: 3. a place where one likes to be; restful or congenial place

One place that is such a home to me is the beach and the ocean. I don't mean Surf Central at Santa Cruz or Poseidon's lair out in the middle of the

ocean. What is home to me is the rocky shorelines and gentle tidepools of Carmel, California.

The Carmel beaches may be just like any other beach to the casual observer, but it seems to me like much, much more. Perhaps it's the fact that the whole town dumps into the ocean. The main street, Ocean Ave., is a downhill slope that ends at Neptune's playground. Or maybe it's just what a person finds there that makes it so congenial.

The rocky beaches of Carmel are filled with tidepools, little civilizations in one square foot of water. You start out at low tide and start searching, Coke in hand, for the rocky portions jutting out against the granular void. What you find are the hard shells of the mussels, the graceful flowing tentacles of the anemone, the crisp outer portion of the barnacles and the occasional trapped fish waiting for the tide to come back in to relieve him of his watery cell.

Occasionally, you can glimpse the hermit crabs crawling a short while, then resting, then crawling, always in search of food. If you're lucky, you can spot a starfish, with its slowly undulating five tentacles, nothing particularly special, except it's living, and in your hand, not a picture in a musty old textbook.

Another aspect of the rocky inlets is solemnity. When you scale the face of a small island and sit on the uppermost rock, you feel safe, secure, ALONE. *It is probably at that point where I feel most at home and at peace with myself. As you sit up there with the salty breeze blowing your hair back, and the great waves crashing below you, occasionally sending up a wash of salty water, that is beyond refreshing, you get a sense of relief. When I sit there, there's no homework, school, parents, war, hate, starvation or lonesomeness. It doesn't make you forget all of these things, but for just one moment, the world seems like a better place.*

There are certain times of day when the sandy plains seem to invite restfulness and congeniality. One such time is early morning. Right as the sun is starting to peak over the horizon, you wake up, put on a few layers of clothes, go get a cup of hot chocolate, and set out for your 3 block walk to the beach. Words don't seem majestic enough to describe the feeling you get as you sit on the road above the beach, your hands warm from the hot cup between them, your face and ears cold with the morning breeze, watching the world wake up. The sun, a perfect golden sphere, rising over a seemingly infinite crystal blue carpet. As the sun's rays break through the dusky *morning fog, you sit and wonder, about creation, about life, wishing you could savor the sights, sounds, and smells your senses receive just a little while longer. But it is futile, until evening. It is almost like a reward for mankind saying, "you made it through another day!" The breeze is not as cool now, and the fog has disappeared, but the stillness still remains. The now red-orange orb stands silent, slowly sinking from the sea of colors produced by its own light, into the delicate swells of the gliding ocean below it. With this unearthly vision in my head, I walk back to the house, with a serenity like no other.*

The feelings that I get from being in Carmel, at certain times, make it seem like home. Whether it's the sunrise or the sunset or the rare invertebrate that I've found after scrutinizing the tidepools all day, it is these feelings, these visions, that always conjure up the word "home," and make me feel completely relaxed and peaceful.

The next paper, also showing high achievement, is rich in observational details of the desert. The writer adds the perspective of historical events and personalizes those events by comparing himself to the "war-bound soldiers." Although the writer seems to get caught up in the soldiers' experience, he does bring us back to the present. The wealth of historical detail seems warranted in this paper as it is reflected in the "rocks, wood, and bottlecaps" the soldiers left behind, part of the very scene that the writer is presenting. It is these historical details that enable us as readers to see the desert through the writer's eyes, altered as his vision is by his knowledge of the past.

At Home in the Desert

I feel most at home in the desert, a desolate place where people are scarce. The day heat and the sand become a part of me, for I am surrounded by miles and miles of it. Best of all, I come in direct contact with nature: The Chuckwalla, the Horned Toad, the bats from a local cave, and a huge array of pleasant smelling sagebrush. I see the sun slip past one of the many mountain ranges. Then, at night, I see almost every star. The only bit of light pollution comes from Blythe or Parker.

To go into the desert is to possibly step where no foot has fallen. There's always that chance. My desert may have been used to get to the ancient gold and silver mines up in the hills. More recently, in 1942, General George Patton used my desert to train for the North Africa Campaign. His troops left these rock pathways and ornate stone mosaics. One message in stone says, "The meek shall not inherit the Earth." In one designated camp named "Iron Mt.," there stands a lonely chapel where many a soldier took refuge under the Cross. To stand where those brave soldiers once stood gives me an immense feeling of pride. Rows of Octilo *plants signify the "tent row" for battalion 263. A place once occupied by thousands now stands deserted. I can still see the rows of 8-man tents with roads trodden down by heavy tanks. Small jeeps race to and fro as men travel to practice with mortars, machine guns, grenades, tanks, and heavy artillery. Men sitting around at night drinking Coca-Cola from bottles,*

which we still find today. Lines of rocks with small offshoots of paths, leading to shelter for the war-bound soldier. They too saw the sun slip behind old Iron Mountain. They used the desert, then left as soon as they came, leaving rocks, wood, and bottle-caps behind.

With the wind at my back and this desert all around, I truly feel at home. I guess the truth is, I am separated from humanity when I am out there. I can feel for humans of the past (soldiers) but I don't feel the same for the people of today. People today lack something that the older generation had. What it is I don't know, but I would like to find out.

Mid-range Achievement

In the next paper, the writer seems genuinely involved and aware of what is going on around him or her. Although written entirely in narrative, the piece shows a logical progression and movement. The author tells the reader of the people and activities but does not show any details that would particularize the surfers, the children, or the sunbathing couples. This could be any one of a number of beaches on any summer day. The writer relies on generalities.

Place Where I Feel Most At Home

The day is sunny and cheerful as my friends and I go to the beach. When we arrive we find we must climb down large boulders to get to the beach. The ocean seems to be pretty calm and the tide isn't all that high. We like to go to a beach with little people and activities for more privacy, that's why we must go to a place with boulders.

In the water are a few surfers and two or three children. Each child has a boogie board with which they try to ride the waves on. When I watch them it brings back memories of when I used to do it.

On the beach there are about two or three couples sunbathing on towels with their children's toys all around them. One couple has had enough and is getting ready to leave. This sometimes takes a while. Last they gather up all of the stuff, shake the towels, and gather their children. When finished they proceed to climb the large boulders to their car.

My friends and I have plans to spend the whole day at the beach. We have brought a lot of stuff including towels, food, and lotion.

Although the writer of the next mid-level paper makes an occasional attempt at specific word choice, most of the observations are general and centered on the author's reactions to his surroundings.

Where I Feel at Home

I feel most at home in Lake Nacimento. It's a very beautiful place to visit. There are many things to do there. Water skiing, rafting, relaxing, and getting a tan are just a few of the things to do.

The lake is just a short drive away from Ventura. The view along the way is very nice, and with a few friends the time goes by very fast.

The water is very peaceful and warm. I love spending my time skiing and rafting. At night there is nothing better than sitting around a warm campfire while the chill of the night tries to penetrate your body.

A warm sleeping bag, and a pillow are the only things you need to get you through the night.

Once you wake up, it's only a few minutes till the chill burns off and the blazing sun warms your tanned *body.*

Low-range Achievement

The writer of "Vinky's House" attempts to make the reader feel at home but gives only minimal visual details such as "books," "clothes," and "food." There is no attempt to elaborate.

"Vinky's House"

This is a place anyone would feel at home at. There is an atmosphere of easy goingness that permeates the place. When you enter the door the first thing you see is a mass of socks everywhere. To the uninformed it might look like a mess, but to those of us who know better it is pure art.

Another thing about Vinky's house is that you don't have to worry about going hungry, everywhere you look there is food.

Where I enter his house I always feel welcome, at ease and comfortable. This may be because Vinkys father is so funny and outgoing. Whatever the reason, I'll feel at home in Vinky's home.

Although the next writer's positive feelings for the gym are obvious, the paper lacks specific descriptive details other than the wall decorations and the noise.

Place Where I Feel Most at Home

The place I feel most at home is a place that has given me very memorable memories. A place where I can be by myself and get away from all my problems and worries. Sometimes this place is filled with fans yelling out your name. But other times it is just with the team made up of my friends and teammates. What am I going to do without this place to go to. Sometimes at night I go to this place and play for hours.

The bulldogs on the walls get me motivated and brings back those memories of the games we won. I must say that the basketball gym is the most favorite place I go and feel at home. I gave me memorable memories *and I never get sick of going.*

Examples of Published Observational Writing

The first example, an extract from Jack London's observations of the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire, exemplifies all of the characteristics of observational writing. The subject is clearly presented and London keeps his point of view firmly centered in his own observations as he walks about the city. The context is clear, and the actual presentation of the scene as the fire progressed throughout the night is a model of the use of concrete language and sensory description.

The San Francisco Earthquake, 18 April 1906[5]

by Jack London

Wednesday night saw the destruction of the very heart of the city. Dynamite was lavishly used, and many of San Francisco's proudest structures were crumbled by man himself into ruins, but there was no withstanding the onrush of the flames. Time and again successful stands were made by the fire fighters, and every time the flames flanked around on either side, or came up from the rear, and turned to defeat the hard-won victory. . . .

At nine o'clock Wednesday evening I walked down through miles and miles of magnificent buildings and towering skyscrapers. Here was no fire. All was in perfect order. The police patrolled the streets. Every building had its watchman at the door. And yet it was doomed, all of it. There was no water. The dynamite was giving out. And at rightangles two different conflagrations were sweeping down upon it.

At one o'clock in the morning I walked down through the same section. Everything still stood intact. There was no fire. And yet there was a change. A rain of ashes was falling. The watchmen at the doors were gone. The police had been withdrawn. There were no firemen, no fire engines, no men fighting with dynamite. The district had been absolutely abandoned. I stood at the corner of Kearny and Market, in the very innermost heart of San Francisco. Kearny Street was deserted. Half-a-dozen blocks away it was burning on both sides. The street was a wall of flame. And against this wall of flame, silhouetted sharply, were two United States cavalrymen sitting their horses, calmly watching. That was all. Not another person was in sight. In the intact heart of the city two troopers sat their horses and watched.

Surrender was complete. There was no water. The sewers had long since been pumped dry. There was no dynamite. Another fire had broken out further uptown, and now from three sides conflagrations were sweeping down. The fourth side had been burned earlier in the day. In that direction stood the tottering walls of the Examiner Building, the burned-out Call Building, the smoldering ruins of the Grand Hotel, and the gutted, devastated, dynamited Palace Hotel.

The following will illustrate the sweep of the flames and the inability of men to calculate their spread. At eight o'clock Wednesday evening I passed through Union Square. It was packed with refugees. Thousands of them had gone to bed on the grass. Government tents had been set up, supper was being cooked, and the refugees were lining up for free meals.

At half-past one in the morning three sides of Union Square were in flames. The fourth side, where stood the great St. Francis Hotel, was still holding out. An hour later, ignited from top and sides, the St. Francis was flaming heavenward. Union Square, heaped high with mountains of trunks, was deserted. Troops, refugees, and all had retreated.

It was at Union Square that I saw a man offering a thousand dollars for a team of horses. He was in charge of a truck piled high with trunks from some hotel. It had been hauled here into what was considered safety, and the horses had been taken out. The flames were on three sides of the square, and there were no horses.

Also, at this time, standing beside the truck, I urged a man to seek safety in flight. He was all but hemmed in by several conflagrations. He was an old man and he was on crutches. Said he: "Today is my birthday. Last night I was worth thirty thousand dollars. I bought five bottles of wine, some delicate fish, and other things for my birthday dinner. I have had no dinner, and all I own are these crutches."

I convinced him of his danger and started him limping on his way. An hour later, from a distance, I saw the truckload of trunks burning merrily in the middle of the street.

In the next example, John Steinbeck presents his observations of life in Stalingrad in 1949, a city still devastated after the Second World War. The subject is identified in this extract only by the title, the context by the reference to the hotel, indicating the author's status as visitor. The selection is noteworthy for its strong sensory language that gives readers a vivid understanding of the author's reactions to his perceptions. The last paragraph is essentially reflective, a charac-

[5]Jack London, "The San Francisco Earthquake," *Colliers Weekly* (May 5, 1906).

teristic frequently found at the close of what is, up to this point, an observation.

Stalingrad, 1949[6]

by John Steinbeck

Across the street was the repaired Intourist Hotel where we were to stay. We were given two large rooms. Our windows looked out on acres of rubble, broken brick and concrete and pulverized plaster, and in the wreckage the strange dark weeds that always seem to grow in destroyed places. During the time we were in Stalingrad we grew more and more fascinated with the expanse of ruin, for it was not deserted. Underneath the rubble were cellars and holes, and in these holes many people lived; Stalingrad was a large city, and it had apartment houses and many flats, and now has none except the new ones on the outskirts, and its population has to live some place. It lives in the cellars of the buildings where the apartments once were. We would watch out of the window of our room, and from behind a slightly larger pile of rubble would suddenly appear a girl, going to work in the morning, putting the last little touches to her hair with a comb. She would be dressed neatly, in clean clothes, and she would swing out through the weeds on her way to work. How they could do it we have no idea. How they could live underground and still keep clean, and proud, and feminine. Housewives came out of other holes and went away to market, their heads covered with white headcloths, and market baskets on their arms. It was a strange and heroic travesty on modern living.

There was one rather terrifying exception. Directly behind the hotel, and in a place overlooked by our windows, there was a little garbage pile, where melon rinds, bones, potato peels, and such things were thrown out. And a few yards farther on, there was a little hammock, like the entrance to a gopher hole. And every morning, early, out of this hole a young girl crawled. She had long legs and bare feet, and her arms were thin and stringy, and her hair was matted and filthy. She was covered with years of dirt, so that she looked very brown. And when she raised her face, it was one of the most beautiful faces we have ever seen. Her eyes were crafty, like the eyes of a fox, but they were not human. The face was well developed and not moronic. Somewhere in the terror of the fighting in the city, something had snapped, and she had retired to some comfort of forgetfulness. She squatted on her hams and ate watermelon rinds and sucked the bones of other people's soup. She usually stayed there for about two hours before she got her stomach full. And then she went out in the weeds, and lay down, and went to sleep in the sun. Her face was of a chiselled loveliness, and on her long legs she moved with the grace of a wild animal. The other people who lived in the cellars of the lot rarely spoke to her. But one morning I saw a woman come out of another hole and give her half a loaf of bread. And the girl clutched at it almost snarlingly and held it against her chest. She looked like a half-wild dog at the woman who had given her the bread, and watched her suspiciously until she had gone back into her own cellar, and then she turned and buried her face in the slab of black bread, and like an animal she looked over the bread, her eyes twitching back and forth. And as she gnawed at the bread, one side of her ragged filthy shawl slipped away from her dirty young breast, and her hand automatically brought the shawl back and covered her breast, and patted it in place with a heart-breaking feminine gesture.

We wondered how many there might be like this, minds that could not tolerate living in the twentieth century any more, that had retired not to the hills, but into the ancient hills of the human past, into the old wilderness of pleasure and pain, and self-preservation. It was a face to dream about for a long time.

The three observational essays that follow provide eyewitness accounts of powerful moments in history. The first, by Charles Dickens, portrays a vivid account of "Death by Guillotine"; the next two chronicle events that illustrate the infamy of the treatment of American slaves in 1846.

The Execution[7]

by Charles Dickens

[The criminal, whose name Dickens does not give, had been condemned for robbing and murdering a Bavarian countess who was travelling as a pilgrim to Rome.]

The beheading was appointed for fourteen and a half o'clock, Roman time: or a quarter before nine in the forenoon. I had two friends with me; and as we did not know but that the crowd might be very great, we were on the spot by half-past seven. The place of execution was near the church of San Giovanni decolláto (a doubtful compliment to Saint John the Baptist) in one of the impassable back streets without any footway, of which a great part of Rome is composed—a street of rotten houses, which do not seem to belong to anybody, and do not seem to have ever been inhabited, and certainly were never built on any plan, or for any particular purpose, and have no window-sashes, and are a little like deserted breweries, and might be warehouses but for having nothing in

[6]John Steinbeck, "Stalingrad, 1949," in *A Russian Journal*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann Books, 1949.

[7]Charles Dickens, "The Execution," in *Pictures from Italy* (Centennial Edition). Boston: Heron Books, 1990, pp. 463–468.

them. Opposite to one of these, a white house, the scaffold was built. An untidy, unpainted, uncouth, crazy-looking thing of course: some seven feet high, perhaps: with a tall, gallows-shaped frame rising above it, in which was the knife, charged with a ponderous mass of iron, all ready to descend, and glittering brightly in the morning sun, whenever it looked out, now and then, from behind a cloud.

There were not many people lingering about; and these were kept at a considerable distance from the scaffold, by parties of the Pope's dragoons. Two or three hundred foot-soldiers were under arms, standing at ease in clusters here and there; and the officers were walking up and down in twos and threes, chatting together, and smoking cigars.

At the end of the street, was an open space, where there would be a dust-heap, and piles of broken crockery, and mounds of vegetable refuse, but for such things being thrown anywhere and everywhere in Rome, and favouring no particular sort of locality. We got into a kind of wash-house, belonging to a dwelling-house on this spot; and standing there in an old cart, and on a heap of cart-wheels piled against the wall, looking, through a large grated window, at the scaffold, and straight down the street beyond it, until, in consequence of its turning off abruptly to the left, our perspective was brought to a sudden termination, and had a corpulent officer, in a cocked hat, for its crowning feature.

Nine o'clock struck, and ten o'clock struck, and nothing happened. All the bells of all the churches rang as usual. A little parliament of dogs assembled in the open space, and chased each other, in and out among the soldiers. Fierce-looking Romans of the lowest class, in blue cloaks, russet cloaks, and rags uncloaked, came and went, and talked together. Women and children fluttered, on the skirts of the scanty crowd. One large muddy spot was left quite bare, like a bald place on a man's head. A cigar-merchant, with an earthern pot of charcoal ashes in one hand, went up and down, crying his wares. A pastry-merchant divided his attention between the scaffold and his customers. Boys tried to climb up walls, and tumbled down again. Priests and monks elbowed a passage for themselves among the people, and stood on tiptoe for a sight of the knife: then went away. Artists, in inconceivable hats of the middle-ages, and beards (thank Heaven!) of no age at all, flashed picturesque scowls about them from their stations in the throng. One gentleman (connected with the fine arts, I presume) went up and down in a pair of Hessian-boots, with a red beard hanging down on his breast, and his long and bright red hair, plaited into two tails, one on either side of his head, which fell over his shoulders in front of him, very nearly to his waist, and were carefully entwined and braided!

Eleven o'clock struck; and still nothing happened. A rumour got about, among the crowd that the criminal would not confess; in which case, the priests would keep him until the Ave Maria (sunset); for it is their merciful custom never finally to turn the crucifix away from a man at the pass, as one refusing to be shriven, and consequently a sinner abandoned of the Saviour, until then. People began to drop off. The officers shrugged their shoulders and looked doubtful. The dragoons, who came riding up below our window, every now and then, to order an unlucky hackney-coach or cart away, as soon as it had comfortably established itself, and was covered with exulting people (but never before), became imperious, and quick-tempered. The bald place hadn't a straggling hair upon it; and the corpulent officer, crowning the perspective, took a world of snuff.

Suddenly, there was a noise of trumpets. "Attention!" was among the foot-soldiers instantly. They were marched up to the scaffold and formed round it. The dragoons galloped to their near stations too. The guillotine became the centre of the wood of bristling bayonets and shining sabres. The people closed round nearer, on the flank of the soldiery. A long straggling stream of men and boys, who had accompanied the procession from the prison, came pouring into the open space. The bald spot was scarcely distinguishable from the rest. The cigar and pastry-merchants resigned all thoughts of business, for the moment, and abandoning themselves wholly to pleasure, got good situations in the crowd. The perspective ended, now, in a troop of dragoons. And the corpulent officer, sword in hand, looked hard at a church close to him, which he could see, but we, the crowd, could not.

After a short delay, some monks were seen approaching to the scaffold from this church; and above their heads, coming on slowly and gloomily, the effigy of Christ upon the cross, canopied with black. This was carried round the foot of the scaffold, to the front, and turned towards the criminal, that he might see it to the last. It was hardly in its place, when he appeared on the platform, bare-footed; his hands bound; and with the collar and neck of his shirt cut away, almost to the shoulder. A young man—six-and-twenty—vigorously made, and well shaped. Face pale; small dark moustache; and dark brown hair.

He had refused to confess, it seemed, without first having his wife brought to see him; and they had sent an escort for her, which had occasioned the delay.

He immediately kneeled down, before the knife. His neck fitting into a hole, made for the purpose, in a cross plank, was shut down, by another plank above; exactly like the pillory. Immediately below him was a leathern bag. And into it his head rolled instantly.

The executioner was holding it by the hair, and walking with it round the scaffold, showing it to the people, before one quite knew that the knife had fallen heavily, and with a rattling sound.

When it had travelled round the four sides of the scaffold, it was set upon a pole in front—a little patch of black and white, for the long street to stare at, and

the flies to settle on. The eyes were turned upward, as if he had avoided the sight of the leathern bag, and looked to the crucifix. Every tinge and hue of life had left it in that instant. It was dull, cold, livid, wax. The body also.

There was a great deal of blood. When we left the window, and went close up to the scaffold, it was very dirty; one of the two men who were throwing water over it, turning to help the other lift the body into a shell, picked his way as through mire. A strange appearance was the apparent annihilation of the neck. The head was taken off so close, that it seemed as if the knife had narrowly escaped crushing the jaw, or shaving off the ear; and the body looked as if there was nothing left above the shoulder.

Nobody cared, or was at all affected. There was no manifestation of disgust, or pity, or indignation, or sorrow.

American Slavery: Sale of Slaves, Virginia, December 1846[8]

by Dr. Elwood Harvey

We attended a sale of land and other property, near Petersburg, Virginia, and unexpectedly saw slaves sold at public auction. The slaves were told they would not be sold, and were collected in front of the quarters, gazing on the assembled multitude. The land being sold, the auctioneer's loud voice was heard, 'Bring up the niggers !'' A shade of astonishment and affright passed over their faces, as they stared first at each other, and then at the crowd of purchasers, whose attention was now directed to them. When the horrible truth was revealed to their minds that they were to be sold, and nearest relations and friends parted for ever, the effect was indescribably agonizing. Women snatched up their babes, and ran screaming into the huts. Children hid behind the huts and trees, and the men stood in mute despair. The auctioneer stood on the portico of the house, and the 'man and boys' were ranging in the yard for inspection. It was announced that no warranty of soundness was given, and purchasers must examine for themselves. A few old men were sold at prices from thirteen to twenty-five dollars, and it was painful to see old men, bowed with years of toil and suffering, stand up to be the jest of brutal tyrants, and to hear them tell their disease and worthlessness, fearing that they would be bought by traders for the Southern market.

A white boy, about fifteen years old, was placed on the stand. His hair was brown and straight, his skin exactly the same hue as other white persons, and no discernible trace of negro features in his countenance.

Some vulgar jests were passed on his colour, and two hundred dollars were bid for him; but the audience said 'hat it was not enough to begin on for such a likely young nigger'' Several remarked that they 'would not have him as a gift'. Some said a white nigger was more trouble than he was worth. One man said it was wrong to sell white people. I asked him if it was more wrong than to sell black people. He made no reply. Before he was sold, his mother rushed from the house upon the portico, crying, in frantic grief, ''My son, O! My boy, they will take away my dear—' Here her voice was lost, as she was rudely pushed back and the door closed. The sale was not for a moment interrupted, and none of the crowd appeared to be in the least affected by the scene. The poor boy, afraid to cry before so many strangers, who showed no signs of sympathy or pity, trembled, and wiped the tears from his cheeks with his sleeves. He was sold for about two hundred and fifty dollars. During the sale, the quarters resounded with cries and lamentations that made my heart ache. A woman was next called by name. She gave her infant one wild embrace before leaving it with an old woman, and hastened mechanically to obey the call; but stopped, threw her arms aloft, screamed, and was unable to move.

One of my companions touched my shoulder and said, 'Come, let us leave here; I can bear no more.' We left the ground. The man who drove our carriage from Petersburg had two sons who belonged to the estate—small boys. He obtained a promise that they should not be sold. He was asked if they were his only children; he answered, 'All that's left of eight.' Three others had been sold to the South, and we would never see or hear from them again.

American Slavery: Punishment of a Female Slave, New Orleans, *c.* 1846[9]

by Samuel Gridley Howe

[The author, Samuel Gridley Howe, was a leading American educator and a pioneer in the education of blind and handicapped children.]

I have passed ten days in New Orleans, not unprofitably, I trust, in examining the public institutions—the schools, asylums, hospitals, prisons, etc. With the exception of the first, there is little hope of amelioration. I know not how much merit there may be in their system; but I do know that, in the administration of the penal code, there are abominations which should bring down the fate of Sodom upon the city. If Howard or Mrs Fry ever discovered so ill-administered a den of thieves as the New Orleans prison, they never described it. In the negroes' apartment I saw much which made me blush that I

[8]Elwood Harvey, Dr., "American Slavery: Sale of Slaves, Virgnia, December 1846," in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1853.

[9]Samuel Gridley Howe, "American Slavery: Punishment of a Female Slave, New Orleans, c. 1846," in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1853.

was a white man, and which, for a moment, stirred up an evil spirit in my animal nature. Entering a large paved courtyard, around which ran galleries filled with slaves of all ages, sexes, and colours, I heard the snap of a whip, every stroke of which sounded like the sharp crack of a pistol. I turned my head, and beheld a sight which absolutely chilled me to the marrow of my bones, and gave me, for the first time in my life, the sensation of my hair stiffening at the roots. There lay a black girl flat upon her face, on a board, her two thumbs tied, and fastened to one end, her feet tied and drawn tightly to the other end, while a strap passed over the small of her back, and, fastened around the board, compressed her closely to it. Below the strap she was entirely naked. By her side, and six feet off, stood a huge negro, with a long whip, which he applied with dreadful power and wonderful precision. Every stroke brought away a strip of skin, which clung to the lash, or fell quivering on the pavement, while the blood followed after it. The poor creature writhed and shrieked, and, in a voice which showed alike her fear of death and her dreadful agony, screamed to her master, who stood at her head, 'O, spare my life! don't cut my soul out!" But still fell the horrid lash; still strip after strip peeled off from the skin; gash after gash was cut in her living flesh, until it became a livid and bloody mass of raw and quivering muscle. It was with the greatest difficulty I refrained from springing upon the torturer, and arresting his lash; but, alas! what could I do, but turn aside to hide my tears for the sufferer, and my blushes for humanity? This was in a public and regularly organized prison; the punishment was one recognized and authorized by the law. But think you the poor wretch had committed a heinous offence, and had been convicted thereof, and sentenced to the lash? Not at all. She was brought by her master to be whipped by the common executioner, without trial, judge or jury, just at his beck or nod, for some real or supposed offence, or to gratify his own whim or malice. And he may bring her day after day, without cause assigned, and inflict any number of lashes he pleases, short of twenty-five, provided only he pays the fee. Or, if he choose, he may have a private shipping-board on his own premises, and brutalize himself there. A shocking part of this horrid punishment was its publicity, as I have said; it was in a courtyard surrounded by galleries, which were filled with coloured persons of all sexes—runaway slaves, committed for some crime, or slaves up for sale. You would naturally suppose they crowded forward, and gazed, horror-stricken, at the brutal spectacle below; but they did not; many of them hardly noticed it, and many were entirely indifferent to it. They went on in their childish pursuits, and some were laughing outright in the distant parts of the galleries; so low can man, created in God's image, be sunk in brutality.

Poets are keen observers of the world around them—animals, people, events. Here are three poems that show all of the characteristics of the best observational writing.

View of a Pig[10]

by Ted Hughes

The pig lay on a barrow dead.
It weighed, they said, as much as three men.
Its eyes closed, pink white eyelashes.
Its trotters stuck straight out.

Such weight and thick pink bulk
Set in death seemed not just dead.
It was less than lifeless, further off.
It was like a sack of wheat.

I thumped it without feeling remorse.
One feels guilty insulting the dead,
Walking on graves. But this pig
Did not seem able to accuse.

It was too dead. Just so much
A poundage of lard and pork.
Its last dignity had entirely gone.
It was not a figure of fun.

Too dead now to pity.
To remember its life, din, stronghold
Of earthly pleasure as it had been,
Seemed a false effort, and off the point.

Too deadly factual. Its weight
Oppressed me—how could it be moved?
And the trouble of cutting it up!
The gash in its throat was shocking, but not
pathetic.

Once I ran at a fair in the noise
To catch a greased piglet
That was faster and nimbler than a cat,
Its squeal was the rending of metal.

Pigs must have hot blood, they feel like
ovens.
Their bite is worse than a horse's—
They chop a half-moon clean out.
They eat cinders, dead cats.

Distinctions and admirations such
As this one was long finished with.
I stared at it a long time. They were going
to scald it,
Scald it and scour it like a doorstep.

[10]Ted Hughes, "View of a Pig," in *Lupercal*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1960.

The Bull[11]

by William Carlos Williams

It is in captivity—
ringed, haltered, chained
to a drag
the bull is godlike
Unlike the cows
he lives alone, nozzles
the sweet grass gingerly
to pass the time away

He kneels, lies down
and stretching out
a foreleg licks himself
about the hoof

then stays
with half-closed eyes,
Olympian commentary on
the bright passage of days.

—The round sun
smooths his lacquer
through
the glossy pinetrees

his substance hard
as ivory or glass—
through which the wind
yet plays—
milkless

he nods
the hair between his horns
and eyes matted
with hyacinthine curls.

Pigeon Woman[12]

by May Swenson

Slate, or dirty-marble-colored,
or rusty-iron-colored, the pigeons
on the flagstones in front of the
Public Library make a sharp lake

into which the pigeon woman wades
at exactly 1:30. She wears a
plastic pink raincoat with a round

collar (looking like a little
girl, so gay) and flat gym shoes,
her hair square-cut, orange.
Wide-apart feet carefully enter
the spinning, crooning waves

(as if she'd just learned how
to walk, each step conscious,
an accomplishment); blue knots in the
calves of her bare legs (uglied marble),

age in angled cords of jaw
and neck, her pimento-colored hair,
hanging in thin tassles, is gray
around a balding crown.

The day-old bread drops down
from her veined hand dipping out
of a paper sack. Choppy, shadowy ripples,
the pigeons strike around her legs.

Sack empty, she squats and seems to rinse
her hands in them—the rainy greens and
oily purples of their necks. Almost
they let her wet her thirsty fingertips—
but drain away in an untouchable tide.
A make-believe trade
she has come to, in her lostness
or illness or age—to treat the motley

city pigeons at 1:30 every day, in all
weathers. It is for them she colors
her own feathers. Ruddy-footed
on the lime-stained paving,

purling to meet her when she comes,
they are a lake of love. Retreating
from her hands as soon as empty,
they are the flints of love.

[11]William Carlos Williams, *Collected Poems: 1909–1939, Vol. I.* Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

[12]May Swenson, "Pigeon Woman," in *To Mix With Time*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963. ©1963 by May Swenson and renewed in 1982. Used with permission of The Literary Estate of May Swenson.

Readings in Observational Writing

Since observational writing is a foundational type of writing, examples are easy to find embedded in the literature already taught in schools. Students can be trained to identify the characteristics of observational writing in newspapers and magazines as well as in stories, poems, and novels. The kind of writing that may be less familiar to them, however, is the rich field of natural science. The very brief starter list presented here focuses primarily on writings in this field. Many of the writers listed combine observational writing with reflection.

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Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1974.
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Fossey, Diane. *Gorillas in the Mist*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984.
Goodall, Jane. *In the Shadow of Man*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1983.
Gould, Stephen Jay. *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987.
Hansen, Eric. *Stranger in the Forest: On Foot Across Borneo*. New York: Viking-Penguin, Inc., 1989.
Hersey, John R. *Blues*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1987.
Iyer, Pico. *Video Night in Kathmandu*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1988.
Lopez, Barry. *River Notes* and *Desert Notes*. New York: Avon Books, 1979.
Lyon, Thomas J. *This Incomparable Land: A Book of American Nature Writing*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989.
McPhee, John. *The John McPhee Reader*. Orinda, Calif.: Vintage Press, 1977.
News of the Universe. Edited by Robert Bly. San Franscisco: Sierra Club Books, 1980.
Owens, Mark, and Delia Owens. *Cry of the Kalahari*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985.
Palmer, Tim. *Endangered Rivers and the Conservation Movement*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
Quammen, David. *The Flight of the Iguana: A Sidelong Look at Science and Nature*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1988.
Thomas, Lewis. *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher*. New York: Viking Press, 1974.
Thomas, Lewis. *The Medusa and the Snail: More Notes of a Biology Watcher*. New York: Viking-Penguin, Inc., 1979.
Wolfe, Tom. *The Right Stuff*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979.

Observational Writing

Prompts for observational writing ask writers to recreate the experience of observing a subject so that readers are able to perceive the subject as the writer experienced it. The observational writer writes from the periphery of observed scenes or events, assuming the stance of eyewitness rather than participant in the scene. The writer may focus, for example, on a person or remembered situation; but the presentation of that person or experience is that of an observer, such as a journalist or an attentive naturalist.

Observational writing is a complex type of writing involving a variety of presentational strategies: factual description, narration, shifts between close-up and distant views, sensory details, and concrete language. The clear presentation of the subject enables the reader to infer the meaning, impact, and importance of the experience for the writer. The best essays exhibit and develop an internal logic and consistency that arise naturally from the writer's controlled awareness of the scene, of the purpose in writing, and of the effect on the reader.

While the *rhetorical* aspect of the assessment focuses on the distinctive features of writing types, the *effectiveness* aspect guides us to look carefully at the more comprehensive features of coherence and style. Coherence, a sense of organization, flow, and focus, is essential to all good writing. The coherent essay has a clear direction, each section flowing naturally from the preceding one. Coherence is demonstrated to readers through emphasis, organization, and repetition achieved through recurrences of language, syntax, and ideas. Style, for the purposes of this assessment, is observable in two written language features: (1) *sentence control* and (2) *word choice* or *diction*. In assessment of the effectiveness of style, the primary considerations are *appropriateness*, *precision*, and *control*.

Score Point 6 – Exceptional Achievement

Identification of Subject. The writer of a six-point essay clearly identifies or defines and focuses the subject of the observation. The subject may be anything observed by the writer, such as an activity involving people, a scene, an animal, an object, or a scientific experiment.

Context. The writer locates the subject in a specific physical or psychological context. The writer focuses the subject clearly and establishes the context as fully and precisely as necessary to orient and ground the reader.

The writer of the six-point essay doesn't ever allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject but goes beyond simply pointing to the subject. Some writers may devote considerable space in the essay to establishing the context; others may focus so compellingly on the details of the scene itself that the context is only briefly mentioned. In any event, throughout the essay, the writer keeps the reader sufficiently aware of the context of the scene.

Observational Stance. In six-point essays, the relationship between the writer as eyewitness and the subject is clearly established, developed, and maintained. Though not an active participant in the scene, the writer is an acute observer, and the stance—the vantage point or point of view of the observation and the voice and tone with which the writer presents the observation—is clear and strong throughout the essay. It is this assured stance that reveals authority while conveying a sense of discovery as much as any other quality that distinguishes the exceptional essay from the commendable.

Writers convey their stance by the details they select and their word choice in presenting their observations to the reader as well as by the point of view, voice, and tone. The best writers might shift their point of view, moving, for example, from close-ups to distant views, to explore the scene from multiple perspectives while retaining consistency in stance. They maintain focus by establishing and continually developing the scene, keeping close and purposeful control of

their own vantage point. For writers of six-point essays, the stance of the historian, the naturalist, the poet, and the journalist are available ways of perceiving and ordering a scene, depending on their purpose in writing and their potential readers.

Presentation of the Experience. The six-point essay provides sufficient detail to re-create for the reader the concrete subject or situation observed and the writer's perceptual experience of that observation. The writer enables the reader to see the scene clearly, to recognize the meaning, impact, and importance that the experience had for the writer.

Because the goal of the observational writer is to re-create the singularity of his or her perception for the reader, the success of these essays is based largely on the writer's choice of and manipulation of presentational strategies, such as the following:

- Factual descriptions of appearance and actions
- Sensory detail
- Concrete images
- Dialogue or monologue
- Narration
- Specific actions, behavior
- Shifting perspectives
- Metaphoric language

The writer of a six-point essay uses a variety of strategies; he or she may present multiple aspects of the subject, interweaving them, moving around the scene like a camera, assuming different vantage points to create a full, rich picture; or he or she may proceed more methodically through the scene, uncovering it slowly, one detail at a time. Whatever strategies the writer uses, the writer exhibits throughout a controlled awareness of the scene itself, of his or her own purposes, and of the developing effect on the reader. The writer of a six-point essay may introduce some reflection but never at the cost of the presentation of the observation.

Score Point 5 - Commendable Achievement

Identification of Subject. The writer of a five-point essay clearly identifies or defines and focuses the subject of the observation.

Context. The writer locates the subject in a specific context. The writer focuses the subject clearly and establishes the context fully to orient and ground the reader.

The writer of the five-point essay does not allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject but, like the writer of the six-point paper, goes beyond simply pointing to the subject. Some writers may devote considerable space in the essay to establishing the context; others may focus on the details of the scene itself, mentioning the context only briefly. In any event, the writer keeps the reader sufficiently aware of the context of the scene.

Observational Stance. In five-point essays the relationship between the writer as eyewitness and the subject is well-established; however, it may not be so fully developed and maintained as in the six-point essays. These five-point essays do convey a sense of authority. The sense of discovery, which is characteristic of the six-point essay, usually is lacking in the five-point paper.

Presentation of the Experience. The five-point essay provides sufficient detail to re-create for the reader the concrete subject or situation being observed and the writer's experience of that observation. The writer enables the reader to see the scene clearly and may convey a sense of the meaning, impact, and/or importance that the experience had for the writer.

The writer of a five-point essay uses a number of strategies but either uses fewer strategies than the writer of a six-point paper or uses them less effectively. The writer exhibits throughout a fairly well-controlled awareness of the scene itself, of his or her own purposes, and of the developing effect on the reader. He or she may introduce some reflection but never at the cost of the presentation of the observation.

Score Point 4 - Adequate Achievement

Identification of Subject. The writer of a four-point essay clearly identifies but rarely defines the subject of the observation.

Context. The writer provides a context for the observation and goes beyond simply pointing to the subject. The writer of the four-point essay may allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject, or the context may be very scant.

Observational Stance. The relationship between the writer as eyewitness and the subject is less clear than in the five- or six-point essays. The point of view may shift but not with the control or purpose that we see in the five- and six-point essays. Voice and tone are likely to convey a less authoritative but still assured stance. These essays are more pedestrian than the five- or six-point papers.

Presentation of the Experience. The four-point essay provides some detail but is often skimpy or unelaborated. The writer provides enough of the scene to enable the reader to see the broad strokes and some aspects in greater detail. The writer may not, however, convey the meaning or importance of the experience.

The writer of a four-point essay uses several strategies but often uses them with little elaboration. He or she may show little awareness of the reader. Reflection, if present, interferes with presentation of the observation.

Score Point 3 – Some Evidence of Achievement

Identification of Subject. The writer of a three-point essay identifies the subject of the observation but often in a general rather than specific way.

Context. The writer may provide some context for the observation, but may allow the context to dominate the essay at the expense of the presentation of the subject or provide very minimal context. Still, the writer goes a bit beyond simply pointing to the subject.

Observational Stance. The stance as eyewitness is often inconsistent. The writer may point to a relationship between the writer and the subject, often tending toward an autobiographical focus. The point of view may shift but not with control or purpose. Voice and tone may be inappropriate to the content of the essay.

Presentation of the Experience. The three-point essay is characterized by generalities rather than by specific details, by listing rather than by elaborating. The writer relies on few strategies, rarely conveys the meaning or importance of the experience for the reader unless he or she states it explicitly. The writer of the three-point essay shows little awareness of the reader. Reflection, if present, interferes with the presentation of the observation.

Score Point 2 – Limited Evidence of Achievement

Identification of Subject. The writer of a two-point essay identifies one or more subjects.

Context. The writer may provide minimal context for the observation; in the case of multiple subjects, context may be completely lacking.

Observational Stance. In a two-point essay, there is almost no eyewitness observation. The essay may take the form of a simple narrative, usually autobiographical; sometimes it will be a report of information or a firsthand biography with most of the information reported rather than observed. The relationship between the writer and the subject is not clear.

Presentation of the Experience. The two-point essay is characterized by generalities, often listed, with very few specific details. The writer does not convey the meaning or importance of the experience and rarely shows any awareness of the reader. A two-point essay often is a simple narrative, report of information, evaluation, or biography; however, there is some attempt at observation.

Score Point 1 – Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Identification of Subject. The writer of a one-point essay may or may not indicate a subject or subjects.

Context. The writer provides no context for the observation.

Observational Stance. In one-point essays, there is no eyewitness observation. The subject, when discernible, may be mentioned only once or twice.

Presentation of the Experience. The one-point essay is characterized by a lack of any sensory detail or by garbled information. The writer does not convey to the reader the meaning or importance of the experience.

Unscorable – Inappropriate Response

Off topic. No response. Written in a foreign language.

High School Writing Guide

Reflective Essay

The reflective essay was given definition by the essays of Michel Eyquem de Montaigne. In choosing to call his pieces "essays," literally "trials," Montaigne focused on writing as exploration and discovery, not writing as final thoughts on established truths. Perhaps this kind of writing as a recognized genre could have emerged into Western culture only after the decline of medieval scholasticism and the reliance on external authority. Writers could explore their own ideas, their own lives, finding new authority within private insight and experience.

Essay writers have charmed and challenged thoughtful readers from Montaigne's time on: Addison and Steele, Lamb, Hazlitt, Virginia Woolf, E. B. White, Joan Didion, and Russell Baker are among those whose essays accurately reflect the tastes and views on world events and issues of their times. Today, reflective essays range from the philosophical treatises of renowned thinkers to the thoughtful, even timely, humorous and trivial probings and musings of local newspaper and magazine columnists. Students will find in the essays of our day a mirror for our time.

Importance of the Reflective Essay

The writing of a successful reflective essay requires the ability to see connections. Moving from a personal experience or a general concept, the writer must explore possibilities, try out ideas, and reach beyond personal implications to a larger, more general significance. Seeing connections is a central component of problem solving, one of the critical aspects of thinking. In reflection, writers are challenged to abandon trite ideas that they cannot validate against their own experiences. Reflection leads beyond such superficial understanding as "We will all die sometime"; beyond wishful understandings, "I hope everyone will want peace"; and beyond moralistic imprints, "We should be kind to one another." It asks for understandings that delve into and explore what we have in common—the universal truth of what it means to be human beings.

With its focus on the writer's search for a meaning applicable to the human condition, the reflective essay is a close kin to other kinds of writing. Autobiography narrates a meaningful personal experience; the reflective essay uses this experience to talk about life in general. Speculation about causes and effects, conjectures about the "whys" and "what-ifs"—the reflective essay uses these speculations as a prod for explorations. Interpretation looks for meaning; the reflective essay uses these meanings to reach

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understanding. Evaluation proclaims a judgment; the reflective essay explores the ramifications of judgments. Using so many different types of writing and thinking, the reflective essay emerges as a rich, challenging type of writing.

Reflection should not be thought of as a quality of mind limited to the academically sophisticated, however. As a cast of mind, reflection begins very early, probably before speech. Although California does not assess the writing of the reflective essay until high school, it assumes the practice of teaching reflective discussion, keeping journals, and writing essays during the entire schooling process. The importance of the reflective thinker in our society cannot be overemphasized.

Characteristics of the Reflective Essay

The style of the reflective essay generally is open, natural, and intimate. While its subject often is stimulated by a small incident, its reasoning is thoughtfully analytical and its intentions philosophical. The writer's skill in balancing these dichotomies determines the quality of the reflective writing.

Inspired by an observation or a personal occasion, a reflective thinker makes connections between the stimulus of experience and idea and explores those connections in the light of other experiences, often arriving at new dimensions of the original thought. Reflective writing shows a process as much as a product, achieving for the writer, and often for the reader, a sort of epiphany, an "ah ha!"

Characteristics of reflective writing, then, include the occasion, the stimulus for reflection, plus the written reflection that extends its meaning for the writer. The exemplary reflective essay is marked by a personal voice and a style that effectively convey the writer's thoughtful considerations.

The Occasion

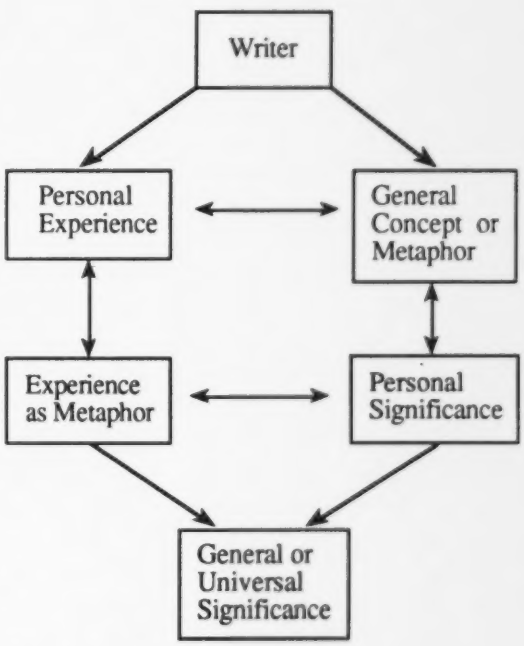
Reflective essays are grounded in the concrete. An ordinary thing seen, done, read, overheard, or experienced can trigger the writer to explore what that occasion might say about the human condition. Occasions for reflection might stem from the observations of a natural phenomenon to a musing over the meaning of a familiar proverb. These occasions become stimuli for the writer to interpret the world in microcosm.

The Reflection

The best reflective writing is exploratory. It uses the specific occasion to explore an abstraction that becomes evident to the reader as the subject of the paper. Writers try out this abstraction, turning it over to see it from several angles, thinking about it long enough to probe its meanings.

Because of the exploratory nature of the reflective essay, a pattern of thinking emerges as the reader reads and the writer writes. Analysis of hundreds of student essays shows that several patterns seem to be typical of the flow of thinking in and out of the following areas:

Patterns of Reflection



Examples of how various patterns work in reflective essays include:

- Narrate a single experience and move in and out of it along the way, reflecting on the significance of various details. The experience becomes a metaphor for a statement about life in general.
- Narrate a full incident, choosing details and images carefully to portray the personal meaning that comes to exemplify a larger understanding of human experience.

- Present a web of related experiences or observations that show, by their interrelatedness, a theme underlying common human experiences.
- Begin with a general concept (a quotation, proverb, or general experience) and test personal experience against it, reflecting on how each experience relates to the general concept. The reflection is refined more fully with each incident against which it is tested.

It is crucial to remember that identified patterns are just that—identified, not prescribed before the writing. By its very nature, the reflective essay assumes patterns that exhibit configurations of thinking. When exploring an idea, a writer must not be constrained by externally imposed patterns of thought. The fact that thinking in writing does assume patterns that can be identified underscores the importance of teaching habits of thinking, then allowing these habits full rein through thoughtful, reflective assignments.

Whatever organization or thought pattern emerges, the writer's reflections give broader meanings to personal narration and bring focus to the essay. Reflection creates insights—perhaps not new awareness but reawakened or deeper awareness. In the best papers, there is a clear change in chemistry of the writer's view of the world, an epiphany for the writer and perhaps for the reader.

Voice and Style

General readers as well as teachers are affected by the ways in which writers convey their ideas. In the reflective essay, voice and style are significant factors. Because the reflective essay tracks the process of thinking something through to a new awareness, the voice of the writer must be clearly discernible. The primary considerations in thinking about style—that elusive yet integral aspect of writing—are appropriateness, precision, and control. Together, voice and style infuse the reflective essay with the personality of the writer.

Exemplary Student Essay

Dedicated to Jenny: For the Best Sisterhood
by Marla Lewis

"Oh my god!" I shrieked.

"What? What happened?" questioned my dad a little anxiously, looking in the rear view mirror of the car for a split second.

[Dramatic opening dialogue establishes the writer's attitude toward her younger sister.]

"Jenny took my socks without asking and now there are holes in them!" I replied with anger burning in my eyes. God, was I steaming. These were not just any socks, these were my fuchsia and black striped socks that I rarely wear, because they are so . . . so special. I've never seen another pair like them. Boy, I could kill her right now. Not literally of course, but . . . oh! I try to do her a favor by coming to her school's open house, when I could be working on my homework and get to bed early, but no. I'm too nice for that! And look at the thanks I get. My darling sister does stuff like that all the time. She goes into my room and takes out my clothes which don't fit her, she unlocks my locked door with a scissor, she sneaks in my bed in the middle of the night, she hides in my closet when I'm changing, she even takes out my undergarments and parades around the house in them. My fists were clenched, my teeth were grinding each other, and my . . .

[Concrete details. Specific examples of younger sister's encroachment on her privacy.]

"Marla, will you get out already."

He did it again! Just as I'm going through a very dramatic moment in my life, he interrupts me again! What is with him? This is twice in a row!

[Writer acknowledges overdramatizing the incident.]

I followed my dad two steps behind as we made our way to my nine year old sister's class. I was deciding the approach to use on her. "Jenny, why did you go in my room when I told you not to?!?" No, if I yelled at her I would make more of a fool out of myself than of her. "Jenny, as soon as I get home I am going to throw Madel's grave away." No, even that one was too harsh for me. Madel was our dog that we had to put to sleep, and my sister made a box devoted to memorabilia of Madel. How about "Jenny, I am . . . ."

[Writer rehearses her confrontation with Jenny, again consciously overplaying her anger.]

I came to a halt. I just approached the door of my sister's classroom. Here goes nothing. I plastered a fake grin on my face as I entered the room. My ears began to ache as the voices of mothers, sisters, brothers, teachers, and students all began to sound off at once. I took a deep breath, hoping to inhale a breath of fresh air, yet the dusty smell of chalk seemed to make its way in through my nostrils.

I needed to get out of there as soon as possible. I looked in front of me and saw desks lined with name tags. A flash of purple caught my eye. "Jenny." Great! I found her seat. I noticed a puffy pink cloth covering; it looked like a book, on top of her desk. I was wondering what that was. I started my journey (I call it a journey because each step I had taken was cut off by a little kid running by) toward her desk with the smile still on my face. But my smile disappeared, for right in front of my path was Jenny. My eyes narrowed, my jaw locked, and my fists tightened.

[Precise details; as in "dusty smell of chalk," "a flash of purple." Foreshadowing.]

"You're in trouble when we get home," I said in the most threatening voice that I could possibly speak.

[Believable interaction between the sisters.]

I guess she knew what she was in trouble for, because without questioning me, she ran off calling after one of her friends. I made my way towards her desk ignoring the little kids I bumped into. What a spoiled, rotten, little jerk! When is she ever going to learn? For god's sake she is nine years old already! She makes me so god damned mad! She is such a brat! God I wish she was never . . .

[Shift in consciousness is accomplished with effective paragraph transition.]

. . . a tingling sensation began at the bottom of my toes. Slowly it began to creep its way up my calf's, my thighs, my neck, all the way to the roots of my hair. I could feel the hairs on my arms and the back of my neck raise one by one. My tongue began to press ever so gently on the roof of my mouth as I swallowed, feeling the saliva creep its way down my throat. I felt my eyes beginning to burn, like they do when I cut onions. The burning alleviated a little and was replaced with liquid. The liquid managed to escape my left eye and a tear dropped.

[Extended sensory details chronicle the writer's emotion.]

There, in my hands, I was holding the cloth covered book that I was attracted by. The book was titled The Book of Poems: by Jenny Lewis. *Slowly my eyes made their way to the first page of the book once again.*

"This book is dedicated to Marla for giving me the best sisterhood."

I laid the book gently on the desk, staring at the words as if they said something that determined the fate of my life. I covered my cheeks with the palms of my slightly trembling hands, and felt the increasing heat on my cheeks. Sisterhood? I looked around the room and every desk, every wall, every person was blurred by my vision, except for one thing. In the very far right hand corner of the room was a little girl. Her beautiful red, curly hair complimented her fair skin which was covered with freckles. Her brown eyes had such depth to them and her nose had such perkiness. That little girl was my sister. The one that said I had given her the best sisterhood.

[Again, details ("gently") carry the weight of emotion. Contrast in emotion is emphasized by glowing portrait of the little sister.]

What kind of sisterhood was that? How many times have I said "Jenny, do you want to do something this weekend" and ended up canceling our plans to be with my peers? How many times have I yelled at her to get out of my room, even if she came in to say hello? How many times have I called her a "filthy pig" for not cleaning up her room? How many . . . how many times have I ever thanked her for giving me the "best sisterhood?"

[Here the writer shifts from the incident, the occasion for reflection, to an extended musing on the nature of their "sisterhood."]

Up until that night . . . never. When I was ten and she was three, I used to pretend she was my own child, because I loved her. In the first grade I brought Jenny to school to share with my class, because I loved her. When she was two years old and ran a one-hundred and five degree temperature, I cried because I loved her. And when I scold and criticize her as I have during these past seven years, I do so because . . . I love her.

Yet, I never realized this love exists. I suppose that gives me the answers to some of the questions I've wondered about through life. I've always screamed at my sister for coming in my bed at night, but there are nights when she hasn't asked to sleep with me, and I lay awake in my empty bed wondering why I can't fall asleep. I've also wondered why I fight with my sister, yet if I hear someone dare do or say anything that will hurt her, I will give them a piece of my mind. I probably would still be trying to figure out the answers if it had not been for that night.

[Full-fledged reflective thought here, grounded firmly in the occasion, but including reflections about the meaning of love in the abstract ("the questions I've wondered about through life").]

Because that night, I realized that my "bratty little sister" was one of the most important things in my life. I believe that my sister and I are going through a phase right now. Seven years is a big age difference especially at this point in our lives. As I'm living my teen years, she just reached her double digits. Right now we have different priorities in life. While mine is to make plans for college, hers is to see how filthy she can keep her room before my mom gets perturbed. But now I see that everything she does, such as using my toothbrush, is to test me.

I think she wants to see what she can do to make me blow a fuse. But you know what . . . I don't

mind. Even though we always end up fighting, I really don't mind. Because if she puts in so much time bothering me and suffering the consequences, then that must be her way of showing her love towards me. And all the more I realize that I love her. Maybe we never will have the same priorities in life, or agree with anything, but that's okay. Because if my relationship with her is so important, I won't let the little things get in the way. I always thought how wonderful it would be to have a relationship with my sister like the characters do on the long-distance phone commercials. At first there are scenes when the two siblings are growing up and always fighting. But then it shows them old and grey talking to each other on the phone laughing, crying . . . .

[Extended reflections on the relationship; moves out to compare her relationship with her sister to media portrayals of siblings.]

Moments, like the one on the commercial, are the kinds that last forever. We tend to forget how special those moments can be. Not everyone can have the relationship Beaver Cleaver had with his brother Wally. We need to learn that those relationships rarely exist. But if we keep pointing out all the negative parts of the relationship between our brothers and sisters, we will never be able to recognize the special times that occur. Those marked moments are the ones that allow us to make our way through life, because we will have that feeling that someone out there cares for us. Maybe it was our brother or sister going to our football game, sharing a secret with us, letting us borrow their clothes, or dedicating a poem book to us, for giving "the best sisterhood," there will always be some special moment. And when times get really rough, we often think how wonderful it would be, to be the only child. Yet, deep down inside, we know that our lives would be missing that special essence. Just as Sophocles's Antigone said, "I could have had another husband, and by him other sons; but mother and father lost, where would I get another brother?" Where would I get another Jenny?

[Shift to "we" signifies generalizations, reflections about people in general; explores abstraction by expressing connections between her own "sisterhood" and sibling relationships in general; powerful conclusion with apt quotation from *Antigone* followed by her own echoing question.]

One Student's Writing Process

Prewrite

"Come on Marla, we haven't got all night!"

"Just a second!" I answered rather annoyed. I was in the middle of a math problem and my father's demanding voice startled me, and my concentration left. I heaved a huge sigh as I slammed my math book shut.

"Now Marla! or we'll leave without you!" informed my dad.

Hey, now that's not a bad idea! Oh, gosh, just think of all the homework I could easily get out of the way in those 30 minutes that I would be spending at that dreaded place once again, my little sisters "Open House." I have nothing against my nine year old sister, except the fact that she sneaks in my room & sleeps in my bed every night, she goes through my dresser drawers, she puts lipstick on and kisses my mirrored closets, she takes out my brassiere and wears it around the house, and gosh the list goes on forever. But my idea of fun is definitely not walking around her school campus being hurdled down by kids running to and fro. Heck, if I have the option of not going then . . .

"Bye!" shouted my brother in that tone that gets me so mad. His voice implies "I am dad's favorite and you are a piece of trash so ha!"

Anyway I ended up at her open house and she had a book of poems dedicated to me . . . .

How I Felt Then

My insides began to have a tingling sensation. It started at my toes and when it reached my upper torso I began to freeze up. The room around me began to get larger and larger and the voices around me became mumbled. I could hear kids, parents, and teachers talking, but I could not make out the words that they were saying. I looked around the room and the only clear figure I could see was this curly red-headed little girl walking around with more pride on her chubby-cheeked little face than I have ever seen. The tingling sensation began to overcome my body again, but this time my torso began to warm up. My upper corner of my lip began to twitch. I couldn't stop it. My eyes began to sting and one of them became blurred. I felt a watery substance trying to escape my left eye.

How I Feel Now

Today I look back to how I felt then. I never realized how much I meant to my sister. After all the times I yelled at her for coming in my room, made plans with her & then broke them to do something with my friends, told her I hate her because she always bothers me, there was still something inside of her that loved me. And her love for me makes me feel a true strong love. Whenever we fight, argue, etc. in the present, I realize that this is just a phase we are going through. There is such an age difference right now and some arguments are healthy, but I know they are ok. At night, I'll go into her room and look at her peacefully sleep, after I just told her she can't sleep in my bed. And I look at her and a flutter takes place in my heart because she has been placed

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somewhere inside me. She is my sister, and I will always ♥ her.

We as a Whole

People today don't realize that life isn't the perfect Beaver Cleaver world. Families are torn apart by divorce, both parents need to work and conflicts arise! Those arguments, etc. that result only help us as people to grow. As long as we know that deep down inside we really love the person. That's what is important in life. Like Antigone says in her speech, "You can always get another husband or son, but mother & father lost, where would you get another brother?"

Plan
- Talk about getting there
- Mad at Dad
- See sister
- Get frustrated
- Walk to desk
- Feelings
- Question
- Realization

. . . thus the square root of sixteen is four, which means that the answer is . . .

"Marrrrlaaa! We're leaving now!"

Gosh darned! Every time I'm working on a seemingly impossible math problem, I always get interrupted! I swear to god, my family must be able to read my mind or something. I mean how else would they know the exact wrong time to disturb me? I owe the honor, of this great disturbance, to my father.

"Yea, yea, I'm coming," I answered back, mumbling under my breath. I knew that my father couldn't possibly hear me, for he was in the kitchen and I was in my room, but I was rather annoyed at the moment and knew my tone of voice wouldn't be very pleasant. Besides, I certainly was in no rush. After all, it was that dreadful . . . time . . . of the year again . . . my little sister's . . . open house. Don't think I have anything against my sister, because I don't . . . at least most of the time . . . some of the time? . . . alright, rarely ever. I just can't find any enjoyment being hurdled down by kids half my size, which considering my height isn't saying that much. I really like kids, but being around thirty with their families in one room, is a little more than I can handle, especially now.

"We're leaving without you!" called out my dad.

Hey, now there's an idea! Just think how much I could accomplish in the time that I would be at her school! Actually, I'll probably spend the whole time wallowing in guilt. I made my way through the hall, the family room, and the kitchen. Great! They were already outside. I left the house, taking a quick glance behind, pleading helplessly to no one to rescue me from this torture.

I sat down in the car, not getting too comfortable, for I would have to get out in a minute. Alright, this isn't going to be so bad. In fact maybe I'll . . .

"OH MY GOD!" I shrieked.

"What? What happened," questioned my dad a little anxiously.

"Jenny took my socks without asking and now there are holes in them!" I replied. God, was I steaming. These were not just any socks, these were my fuchsia and black striped socks that I rarely wear, because they are so . . . so special. I've never seen another pair like them. Boy, I could have killed my sister then. Not literally of course, but . . . oh! She does stuff like this all the time. She goes into my room and takes out my clothes which don't fit her, she unlocks my locked door with a scissor, she sneaks in my bed in the middle of the night, she hides in my closet when I'm changing, she even takes out my undergarments and parades around the house in them. My fists were clenched, my teeth were grinding each other, and . . .

"Marla, will you get out already."

He did it again! Just as I'm going through a very dramatic moment in my life, he interrupts me again! What is with him? This is twice in a row!

I followed my dad two steps behind as we made our way to my nine year old sister's class. I was deciding the approach to use on her. 'Jenny, why did you go in my room when I told you not to?!?' No if I yelled at her I would make more of a fool out of myself than her. 'Jenny, as soon as I get home I am going to throw Madel's grave away.' No, even that one was too harsh for me. Madel was our dog but we had to put her to sleep and my sister made a box devoted to memorabilia of Madel. How about 'Jenny, I am . . ."

I came to a halt. I just approached the door of my sister's classroom. Here goes nothing. I plastered a fake grin upon my face as I entered the room. My ears began to ache as the voices of mothers, sisters, brothers, teachers, and students all began to sound off at once. I took a deep breath, hoping to inhale a breath of fresh air, yet the dusty smell of chalk seemed to make its way in through my nostrils.

"Achooo . . . A-a-a-Choo," I sneezed.

"God bless you," someone exclaimed as they walked by. I smiled and replied with a thank you.

I need to get out of here as soon as possible. I looked in front of me and saw desks lined with name tags. A flash of purple caught my eye. "Jenny." Great! I found her seat. I noticed a puffy pink cloth covering, it looked like a book, on top of her desk. I was wondering what that was. I started my journey (I call it a journey because each step I had taken was cut off by a little kid running by) toward her desk with the smile still on my face. But my smile disappeared, for now right in front of my path was Jenny. My eyes narrowed, my jaw locked, and my fists tightened.

"You're in trouble when we get home," I said in the most threatening voice that I could possibly speak.

I guess she knew what she was in trouble for, because without questioning me, she ran off calling after one of her friends. I made my way towards her desk ignoring the little kids I bumped into. What a spoiled, rotten, little jerk! When is she ever going to learn? For god's sake she is nine years old already! She makes me so god damned mad! She is such a brat! God I wish she was never . . .

. . . a tingling sensation began at the bottom of my toes. Slowly it began to creep its way up my calf's, my thighs, my neck, all the way to the roots of my hair. My stomach had an emptiness, not an ordinary hunger emptiness, but an emptiness that if I ate all the food in the world, I would still not be able to relieve that pain. I could feel the hairs on my arms and the back of my neck raise one by one. My tongue began to press ever so gently on the roof of my mouth, as I swallowed feeling the saliva creep its way down my throat. I felt my eyes beginning to burn, like they do when I cut onions. The burning alleviated a little and was replaced with liquid. The liquid managed to escape my left eye and a tear dropped.

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What kind of sisterhood was that? How many times have I said "Jenny, do you want to do something this weekend" and ended up canceling our plans, to be with my peers? How many times have I yelled at her to get out of my room, even if she came in to say hello? How many times have I called her a "filthy pig" for not cleaning up her room? How many . . . how many times have I ever thanked her for giving me the "best sisterhood?"

Up until that night . . . never. When I was ten and she was three, I used to pretend she was my own child, because I loved her. In the first grade I brought Jenny to school to share with my class, because I loved her. When she was two years old and ran a one-hundred and five degree temperature, I cried, because I loved her. And when I scold and criticize her as I have during these past seven years, I do so because . . . I love her.

Yet, I never realized this love exists. I suppose that gives me the answer to some of the questions I've wondered about through life. I've always screamed at my sister for coming in my bed at night, but there are nights when she hasn't asked to sleep with me, and I lay awake, in my empty bed, wondering why I can't fall asleep. I've also wondered why I fight with my sister, yet if I hear someone dare do or say anything that will hurt her, I will give them a piece of my mind. And yet probably would still be trying to figure out the answers, if it had not been for that night.

Because that night, I realized that my "bratty little sister" was one of the most important things in my life. I believe that my sister and I are going through a phase right now. Seven years is a big age difference especially at this point in our lives. As I'm living my teen years, she just reached her double digits. Right now we have different priorities in life. While mine is to make plans for college, hers is to see how filthy she can keep her room before my mom gets perturbed. But now I see that everything she does, such as using my toothbrush, is to test me.

I think she wants to see what she can do to make me blow a fuse. But you know what . . . I don't mind. Even though we always end up fighting, I really don't mind. Because if she puts in so much time bothering me and suffering the consequences, then that must be her way of showing her love towards me. And all the more I realize that I love her. And maybe we never will have the same priorities in life, or agree with anything, but that's okay. Because if my relationship with her is so important, I won't let the little things get in the way. I always thought how wonderful it would be to have a relationship with my sister, like the characters do on the long-distance phone commercials. At first there are scenes when the two siblings were growing up and always fighting. But then it shows them old and grey talking to each other on the phone laughing, crying . . .

Moments, like the one on the commercial, are the kinds that last forever. We tend to forget how special those moments can be. Partially because television creates an illusion that families are supposed to be perfect. Not everyone can have the relationship Beaver Cleaver had with his brother Wally. And we need to learn that those relationships rarely exist. But if we keep pointing out all the negative parts of the relationship between our brothers and sisters, we will never be able to recognize the special times that occur. And those marked moments are the ones that allow us to make our way through life, because we will have that feeling that someone out there cares for us. Maybe it was our brother or sister going to our football game, sharing a secret with us, letting us borrow their clothes, or dedicating a poem book to us, for giving "the best sisterhood," there will always be

some special moment. Like Antigone said, in Sophocles's Antigone, "I could have had another husband, and by him other sons; but mother and father lost, where would I get another brother?"

Peer Response

Beginning = *It was a great incident to pick, but it is expanded too much. The first several paragraphs don't tell the reader much about what you are trying to say, so they should probably be cut. Start essay on the way to the open house, or maybe as your just getting there, and emphasize more of your anger toward your sister for the socks. Good narration style but way too lengthy. Some sentences are too choppy.*

Strategies = *Marla uses a description of scene and people, and her narration style is very natural and enjoyable. She does, however, stray too far from the incident itself and has too many sidetracks which can cause the reader to become unfocused. Revise and shorten the beginning to make it more concise, but keep the easy flowing style.*

Occasion = *Once again, it is way too long (almost 75% of your paper). The move from the incident to the reflection is nicely done, but it should come much sooner. Try to cut the incident down to two pages or less at the most.*

Personal meaning = *You have a very good style of reflection that really helps the reader relate. A bit more organization would be good. I had a hard time finding the "then" or "now." Obviously, it was a big revelation then, but specify what further ideas you have had about it since—how do you remember the incident. The "we" reflections are very well done and the quote is a good ending.*

Universal = *The universal aspect of this paper is well-stated and really easy to relate to. It doesn't state any earth-shattering conclusion, but it does reveal a fact that many people don't reflect upon. It has a really positive, upbeat tone, yet it is also realistic in its ideas. i.e. I like it a lot.*

Voice/Tone = *The voice during the narration is your typical, smart aleck teenager and then the tone is shifted to a more reflective type of thought. It is easy to read and relate to because it is not preaching to us, but rather searching for some of the complicated answers to life in general. Perhaps put some of these in earlier rather than leaving all your universal reflections until the end—but otherwise it was good.*

Overall = *This is a good reflective essay except for the incident, which is too long and jumps around too much. Shorten that (to 2 or so pages) and then organize your ideas a bit more and it'll be just perfect!*

Incident = *Start closer to actual incident (poem book realization) to cut out unnecessary pages.*

Prewriting Strategies

Sample strategies to stimulate reflective thinking follow. The suggestions identified are directed to the students.

- Collect possible occasions for reflection. Keep a journal chart of everything that happens during a 24-hour period. List in the left column the particular conversations overheard, scenes observed, or incidents experienced and the general reflective meanings that they might represent in the right.

One example:

Particular occasion	*Possible meaning for reflection*
Sliver in the finger	*Pain—the little things that hurt so much*
Gossip with Sue about Tim and Beth	*The fine line between curiosity and maliciousness*
Cutting down the orchard for a housing development	*Pitfalls of progress*
Smell of chocolate-chip cookies	*Security; feeling loved*

- "Free-write" about an occasion from the chart. Write for 10 minutes, exploring your thoughts about one occasion and the reflective meaning it suggests. The goal of this writing is to record your thoughts as you think them. So, just put your ideas down as they come, letting one idea suggest another. If you find yourself changing your mind from one thought to the next, that's fine. Don't erase the first; just include the new thought. Your aim is to learn what you think about the idea that the occasion has

stimulated and if you have enough to say about it to use in a reflective essay.

- Imitate reflective writing. Using a published piece of reflective writing, analyze one part. Look at what the writer does and the effect it has on the whole piece. Using your own occasion as a start, imitate that author. Work to imitate style as well as thinking process.
- Keep a reflective journal in response to literature. As you study a book (*Of Mice and Men*, for example), respond to significant quotations, stretching your thinking from the concrete to the abstract. A possible journal chart might look like Figure 3 at the bottom of this page.

Response and Revision

Response from others, especially peers, is important for students to develop a sense of audience, a sense that their writing reaches more people than just the teacher. Having others look at their work gives students a sense of purpose; they realize that they write to communicate, not merely to get a grade. Students see what others are doing; they learn from the successes and failures of others. Students in response groups must read for meaning, thinking about what is good in the writing and what might be improved, and communicating these things to the writer.

There are many ways to respond to someone's writing. Response can be written or oral. Groupings can be pairs or small groups. Good, constructive response requires practice. Modeling with the whole class provides a good introduction. Continued modeling introduces new response approaches and reinforces those already in use. The following are some ways to respond to a piece of writing:

- Tell the writer what stands out as being good by underlining, circling, or simply repeating it orally.
- Read, then tell the writer in your own words what you understood. This technique allows the writer to hear whether the writing communicates what she or he wants it to.
- List four or five questions (designed by students and/or the teacher) that require a written response from the reader. The reader commits to a response and communicates it in writing.
- List four or five questions (designed by students and/or the teacher) to guide students in their oral response to the writer.
- Work in small groups (three to five students) to provide an opportunity for the writers to read their papers to others in the group and discuss strengths, possibilities for revision, success in achieving the intent of the author, and so forth.

General response suggestions for partners or groups include:

- Tell the writer what you understand about the essay.
- What idea interests you the most in the essay? Discuss it with the writer.
- Were you able to follow the writer's thinking all the way through? If not, put an X in the margin where you were confused. Discuss this section with the writer.
- Did the beginning of the essay capture your attention? If not, give the writer some ideas about how to do so.
- Mark places in the essay where ideas might be further explored.
- Does the writing fit the purpose? Find specific words or phrases that give the essay its tone and write them down.

Quotation from text	Response – meaning in text	Personal response – what I think of the idea	Reflective response – what it says about the world
"Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy. I just like to know what your interest is."	*The boss doesn't believe that George could just be Lennie's friend. He is not used to seeing true friendship.*	*There is a lot of suspicion among these men. It must be hard to live together and not be friends. Breeds more distrust.*	*Men live in their own shells. Alienation. Living together without trust is worse than living alone. Mistrust.*

Fig. 3. Reflective Journal

Response suggestions specific to reflective essays include:

- Identify the occasion for reflection. Is it a personal experience, a web of experiences, an observation, a quotation, or something else?
- Does the writer use effective strategies in presenting the occasion? Some effective strategies include using examples, details, sensory language, dialogue, action, and quotations.
- How does the writer show the connections between the occasion for reflection and the ideas it generated?
- Has the writer explored both personal and general reflections? Locate expressions of both personal significance and a more general or universal significance.
- Did the essay bring the writer to a deeper awareness of an idea or make the writer see something in a different way? If you cannot tell, suggest ways that the writer might further explore the subject of the reflection.
- Does the personality of the writer come through the essay? If not, suggest how the writer might make the essay sound more natural.

Classroom Writing Assignments

The assignments included here suggest the variety of subjects that can be the focus of writing across the curriculum.

Language Arts

Different approaches can be used to help students arrive at an occasion from which to write a reflective essay. Some examples follow:

- Ordinary events that when noted can lead to reflection about larger meanings:
  - A grain of sand in your eye
  - The sound of bells
  - A blister
  - The scent of after-shave
  - Bumper stickers
  - A home run
  - Gossip in the hall
  - Body language
  - An argument with a parent
  - Winning a ball game
- Aspects of nature that can serve as symbols of greater meaning:
  - An ant colony
  - Moths beating against the light
  - The calm before the storm
  - A snail's path
  - The smell of new-mown grass
- Objects or events associated with childhood that symbolize aspects of life:
  - Toys
  - Games
  - Bedtime rituals
  - Baby-sitters
- Qualities affecting our model behavior that can stimulate reflection:
  - Egotism
  - Fidelity
  - Success
  - Fear of losing
  - Others' expectations
  - Desire to win
  - Materialism
  - Self-respect
  - Creativity
- Significant quotations from other people that stimulate reflective thinking:
  - "The dismal fact is that self-respect has nothing to do with the approval of others." – Joan Didion
  - "Wherever we go, whatever we do, self is the sole subject we study and learn." – Emerson (journals)
  - "Apology is only egotism inside out." – Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.
- Seeing connections between the literary pieces to stimulate reflection:
  - *Of Mice and Men* and *Romeo and Juliet*: what men will sacrifice for love
  - *The Pearl* and *Brave New World*: personal and social corruption

Literature

Most poems offer subjects for reflection. This is an example of a short poem that may be used as a stimulus for a reflective journal or essay assignment.

Meditatio[1]

by Ezra Pound

When I carefully consider the curious habits of
dogs
I am compelled to conclude
That man is the superior animal.

When I consider the curious habits of man
I confess, my friend, I am puzzled.

Ezra Pound's brief observations may lead to a reflection on how an animal's behavior can offer insights into the behavior of human beings. After a discussion in which groups explore how animal behavior as applied to human beings has infiltrated our language, students might choose any animal whose behavior has intrigued them by its similarities to human behavior. In the process of reflection, students should be encouraged to use specific incidents, either one elaborated incident or a web of interconnecting occasions, as they probe the reflections of animal behavior in themselves and others.

Extended Assignment

After introducing the Pound poem or another dealing with animal/human behavior similarities, students could search for additional poems dealing with this subject. From a general search, students could narrow their selection to poems about a specific animal. By responding to each poem in their reflective journals, students collect a backlog of ideas to use when writing a full reflective essay on the subject of animal/human behavior similarities.

History–Social Science

Reflecting on a Rule That You Live By

Prewriting directions for students include the following:

1. Write down three rules that you live by.
2. Choose one of these rules and do a quick sketch of a symbol that can stand for the rule you selected.
3. Cluster your rule; think about where it came from, experiences you have had with it (positive and negative), your feelings about how others deal with it, and so forth.
4. Do a quick drawing of a situation in which you confronted, were confronted by, or became aware of that rule. Below your drawing, explain what you drew.

Write an essay in which you explore this rule, not only as it applies to you but also as it applies to other people or to society in general. Be sure to use specific occasions from your own experience as you inquire into the meaning this rule has for you and other people.

All Subjects

From Journal to Essay

Prewriting activities include the following:

1. Choose a passage from a text (newspaper, television show, movie, novel, play, and so forth). Copy the passage, or, if it is an event from television or the movies, summarize it briefly, telling what happened.
2. Place the event/quotation in context. What was going on before or after it happened?
3. Do a quick sketch of this event/quotation and explain your drawing.
4. Respond personally. What do you think about this quotation or event? What does it make you remember from your own life? What are your feelings about it?
5. Explore this event/quotation. How do you think others might feel about it? How do you think others might respond to it?

Write a reflective essay in which you explore this event/quotation. Be sure to present the event or quotation that triggered your ideas. Continue to explore the ideas it stimulated until you have dealt with its significance for other people as well as for you.

[1]Ezra Pound, "Meditatio," in *Faber Book of Children's Verse*. Compiled by Janet A. Smith. London: Faber & Faber, 1953.

The following assignment represents the kind of essay a science teacher could use following the study of any naturally-occurring substance. Rather than assigning full-fledged essays, however, the science teacher might establish the habit of reflective thinking by having students set up a reflective journal in which they respond thoughtfully to the issues—scientific, ethical, personal—that arise in the natural course of any science class.

Reflecting on Water

Writing Situation. The class has been studying the nature of water—its composition, its many forms, its usefulness as a source of power, its necessity to both the animal and plant worlds, and its potential for destruction.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay in which you explore some aspect of water. Using specific experiences you have had or know about, reflect on the meaning of its power, its beauty, its potential for life and for death, or some other quality that you want to explore.

Additional Exemplary Student Essays

Students are encouraged to think reflectively and have the benefit of assignments that allow for time to think, draft, and work with the teacher and with a writing group. When they understand that revision is rethinking and that editing helps them prepare their work for a wider audience, then they submit their papers with confidence and pride. The following reflective essays are exemplary in that they represent what thoughtful students can do when taught to write the reflective essay. These papers, exemplifying a variety of patterns of reflection as well as writing assignments, may prove useful as models for other students.

The first essay, "Banana Popsicle," surfaced in a writing workshop of about five class periods. In this reflection about what our treatment of pets has to say about us, Traci Miringoff begins by describing an incident from her youth. She reflects on its personal meaning, then explains how the incident represents a clichéd expression, thus turning that personal experience with an animal into a metaphor for maintaining relationships. She goes on to cite a parallel incident from a friend's life. Because her details are carefully selected to parallel the incident with the bird, we see how the second experience elaborates and extends the reflection. Her comments about forcing love clarify her final awareness. The last paragraph, returning to the specific occasion that triggered the reflection, allows the concrete to stand alone, symbolizing the full weight of her realization.

Banana Popsicle
by Traci Miringoff

One summer, a humid Wisconsin one, Tom Steffen (the boy I had had a crush on since third grade) and Jeff Johnson (the boy who had had a crush on me since third grade) found a baby bird left alone in its nest. The three of them, Tom, Jeff, and the bird, ended up in my front yard that afternoon, and I fell in love with the bird. It wasn't a particularly spectacular, once-in-a-lifetime looking bird; it was kind of a dried mud brown with wet marble eyes and a dirty yellow beak, but I loved it the instant I saw it sitting quietly in the nest. I wanted it to love me back. We weren't sure what to feed it, and, after scouring my World Book Encyclopedias and offering it a few half dead worms we had dug up, we tried a banana popsicle (we ourselves had been eating them while pondering the problem). The bird responded to that and managed to eat half of mine as we all sat under the maple tree on my front porch. I held the bird in my hand and talked to it while it pecked away, and Tom, Jeff, and I decided to call it "Banana Popsicle." After Banana Popsicle had eaten as much as I felt was good for him, we commenced flying lessons. I carefully placed B.P. on the lowest branch of the maple, held out my arms to him, and screamed "Fly!" I had grand visions of the future: me, my hair blowing in the breeze, whistling shrilly once, and Banana Popsicle swooping down from great heights and far distances to land on my arm and nuzzle me lovingly with his beak. In reality, B.P. didn't even spread his wings; he simply tipped over and fell, like a piece of dead wood. I ran over and picked him up off the ground and tried it again. "Fly!" I yelled as he dropped heavily to the ground a second time and struggled to stand up straight, his glazed eyes blinking. He became weaker and weaker at each passing attempt to make him fly from the branch, and finally he died, lying dazed on the ground with me running to pick him up and to make him realize how much I loved him. Tom, Jeff, and I buried him in a corner of the yard under the maple with a cross made out of the stick of the banana popsicle he had eaten hours before.

Looking back on Banana Popsicle, I can't help feeling I killed him. All right, so maybe he died physically from a sugar overdose from the popsicle or the constant falling from the branch, but his death was also from my strong desire to hold him and make him mine. I wanted to own B.P., but more importantly, I wanted him to love and need me more than anyone else, maybe even exclusively. I had this idea that if I held him enough, petted him enough, and never left him alone, he would love me like I wanted him to.

I hate that cliche, "If you love something, set it free," but if you ignore the stale words for a minute and look at the idea, you can see that it really is a valid thought. By smothering that baby bird I didn't make it love me anymore than I would have if I had let it be free and die on its own. But in trying to possess and grasp at it, I only tired it more and exhausted it until it not only didn't love me, but was only aware of me as a constant, intimidating presence.

The summer before ninth grade, my friend Susan had her first boyfriend. For the first week they were infatuated with each other, constantly together, holding hands, and talking. By the second week, David was alone only when he went to the bathroom or to bed. By the third week, I saw him hiding behind a tree as Susan walked by scouring the camp grounds for him, and by three and a half weeks Susan was broken-hearted and David was with a new girl, free, and relieved.

I think it was Susan's constant trailing and hounding that drove David away from her and ruined their relationship. She wanted to make him love her, force him into feeling a way he really didn't feel. She, like the rest of us, had insecurities and doubts about herself. She lacked the confidence in herself to let David begin to feel (on his own) as strongly about her as she wanted him to. What she really wanted wasn't David or even a boyfriend; what she really wanted was someone or something to give her positive affirmation that she was a worthwhile and valuable person.

In trying to make someone or something love us the best or trying to possess it, we aren't really looking for a boyfriend/girlfriend or a faithful pet, we are looking for acceptance and the feeling that we are a great person who deserves love, affection, and attention. Susan did that with David just as I did it with the baby bird that summer.

Banana Popsicle is probably still buried somewhere under that maple in the front yard, although the cross is most likely gone. I haven't forgotten him, and I can still see his bewildered look as he sat perched on the branch waiting to fall onto the dirt below for the last time.

"Love for a Father" shows the steps in thinking that the writer went through as he reflected on his relationship with his father. The musing tone conveys precisely the slowly evolving awareness that his first yearning—to be able to tell his father of his love for him—would be superficial. When he moves into the scene between King Lear and Cordelia, he takes his own relationship with him, emerging with a commitment to action rather than words. This is clearly a finely crafted essay, one that received the benefit of a chance to work with both the teacher and a supportive writing group.

Love for a Father

by Robert Duncan

At some point in my life my relationship with my father had taken a course in the wrong direction. Instead of becoming closer to my father, as many of the people I know had done, I began to separate from my father. It could have been caused by something that happened once that I no longer remember. I could have grown to a point where I felt a relationship with my father was not important. Despite what happened along the way, I went one direction and my father went another.

I remember once, when I was watching television with only my father in the room, a commercial came on that caused me to become very uncomfortable. The commercial on the television described the relationship between a son and his father. The son was an athlete who was away at college. The father had always been proud of his son and had helped him along since the beginning, giving him the support and encouragement that he had needed to succeed. What had had the greatest impact on me was the words that the son said at the end: "My father never told me he loved me, but then he didn't have to. You see, the words were written all over his face." I tried to imagine myself having a relationship like that with my father. I tried to imagine my father being so proud of me that we would never need to tell ourselves that we loved each other. I tried to imagine how it would be to have a father who is my best friend, but I couldn't close the relationship that I already had with my father inside a box and hide it somewhere.

When I heard the words the son had spoken, I felt guilty and uncomfortable that I hadn't told my father that I loved him in a long time. I shifted my eyes from the television to the floor in order to escape the situation. What made me most uncomfortable was wondering if the commercial had affected my father the same way it had affected me, and, if it had, would something happen. But nothing happened and we both sat in silence as the program that had preceded the commercials began again.

In Shakespeare's play King Lear, *Cordelia, the youngest daughter of King Lear, is confronted with a situation in which she must pledge her love to her father. Despite the pressure upon her to say what will please her father in order to obtain a part of his kingdom, she remains true to her heart and speaks of her love for her father honestly.*

Cordelia: *Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave*
My heart into my mouth. I love
your Majesty
According to my bond, no more
nor less.
Lear: *How, how, Cordelia? Mend your*
speech a little
Lest you may mar your fortunes.

Cordelia is the only one among her sisters who is able to speak honestly and truthfully to her father. She loves her father in a different sense than her sisters speak of. She loves her father for the commitment that he made to love and raise her. He has been the most loving and caring father that he knows how to be. That is what she loves him for most of all.

When I read this scene and had time to reflect upon its meaning in the play and how it will affect the events to follow, I laid down the book and stared into the mirror across from my bed at myself and thought. What Cordelia was able to do is something that I might never be able to do. I might never be able to talk with my father about my feelings towards him. I might never find myself in a situation where I can express how thankful I am for the love and support that he has given me over the years while I have been growing up.

Cordelia is given a chance to express her love towards her father when her father is in need of her help. She searches for her father, and, under her care, restores him to health. She is able to express her love to him, not in words that may be twisted and disguised in order to serve some purpose, but through the same loving care and support that her father has shown for her. She is able to give back to him the same gift that he has given her all of her life, the feeling of being loved by another. Her expression of her heart's love to him is the strongest of all her sisters'.

Now, looking back upon the moment when my father and I were watching television together, I wish that something had happened in order that I could have told him how I love him, but that would have satisfied only my father. That would not have satisfied the need that I have to show him that I love him. What I could have said would have been superficial and forgotten. By showing my love and gratitude, I can express what I feel for him more wholeheartedly and clearly. I believe that the love people feel for each other is more often expressed in their actions and emotions than in the words they speak to each other.

The following exemplary reflective essay was written during an intensive writing workshop. The student had adequate time to work through various stages of writing development. She began by narrating a full incident, focusing on its personal meaning, moving to its meaning for others, and then arriving at a final awareness.

Uphill

I struggle to pedal uphill as the sun beats on my squinting and determined brow. I am going to make it this time, I decide. And the right leg pushes. And the left. And pedalling, and pedalling, and harder and harder and — Damn. I look around. Is anyone watching? Millions, it seems, as I lumber onto solid, stolid ground and crouch with false concern next to the curb. I pretend to examine the gears, muttering hasty insanities. "Don't know why it didn't shift. Could be a problem with the gears . . . ." As if anyone is listening. I sigh and know that passing motorists can't hear my feeble excuses. They only see me, and the bicycle. My face burns a brighter red. I slowly stand, right the bike, and face the truth. I will have to push it. Again. I have failed.

As I walk, I curse myself forcibly, reaffirming not only my physical ineptitude, but my utter lack of stamina, dignity, and character.

Finally, I reach the top of the seemingly endless stretch where pedestrianism is paramount to inadequacy. I mount the bike again and heave a sigh of relief to be in control once more.

Why is it so wrenchingly painful to walk my bike? Why does this action lead me to such depths of self-loathing? For me, cycling is a humbling experience; I am routinely set face to face (or leg to leg) with failure. In general, I tend to avoid situations where I know I will not be successful. I do not play volleyball. I avoid singing in public. I watch while others bowl. Yet, somehow, I climb back onto a bicycle, knowing that I will never win a major race, ride across America, or even avoid walking the cursed machine.

Being mediocre, even terrible, satisfies a deep yearning. My quest for failure? Perhaps. Often, my downfalls bring me joy as I reflect upon them. Walking instead of riding up a hill signifies not only imperfection, but a recognition of it as such, and an acceptance of myself as a person who fails. Such a public statement of my weakness takes courage for me. Much more typical behavior for myself, and perhaps for others, comes in avoiding failure.

Very early in life, we are channeled into activities where we will succeed. Tall boys are taught basketball, strong boys practice football, runts learn piano. If a child shows true aptitude in an area, s/he is encouraged to pursue it to the neglect of other, less promising interests. To the contrary, encouragement dies fast once Peter shows a lack of coordination while shooting baskets. Our society is geared towards success; parents desire highly achieving children. Thus, they applaud successes and steer little ones away from less glorious situations which they see as potentially traumatic. Ironically, even when these efforts are effective and produce skillful athletes, students, or performers, they do not reinforce basic self-esteem. Fear of this failure looms largest when it has been experienced least often.

As children approach adulthood, they steer themselves towards "safe" pursuits. Competition becomes more serious. It seems a waste of time to pursue something if one cannot excel, and the possibility of failure grows more drastic. The very words "success" and "failure" cease to refer to specific incidents; they become instead basic evaluations of self.

Getting off my bike to walk up a hill is, in effect, a failure. The real pain, though, occurs in the instant when I transfer this incident onto myself. I become the failure. Yet, as I climb back on and pedal once more, I realize that my underdeveloped thigh muscles do not reflect the demise of my general character. Neither, for that matter, do my other failures. Unfortunately, I am not sure enough to lay myself on this probing line very often. I have doubt that I will be able to shift the burden of failing from myself to my action; it is much more comfortable to avoid such painful situations entirely. Such denial of my faults, though, is not only impossible, it is undesirable.

I freely admit that my most valiant efforts at various pursuits have proven to be, if not in vain, also not exactly aesthetically pleasing. I am slowly learning to accept these hideously public embarrassments, and am delving deeper into my private failings.

It would be a lie to claim that I no longer pretend my bike is malfunctioning when I am too weak to pedal. But with each quick glance for snickering acquaintances, I smile more broadly at my own imperfections. Even more serious failures serve as humbling but joyous blows at the notion that my achievements alone comprise worth. My failures are my freedom.

The next essay, "Growing," shows how Jennifer, a senior, looks back at her high school experience. The writing was preceded by a class analysis of short models of reflective writing: "Strangers," an essay written by a college freshman, Cheryl Nelson (*Active Voices IV*, edited by James Moffett, Boynton/Cook), and "The Death of the Moth," by Virginia Woolf, appear in the last section of this guide, "Published Examples of Reflective Writing."

Growing

I'm 18! I'm mature! I've arrived. I have my own checkbook and money in the bank. For my birthday I even got my own luggage. What freedom. Or so I thought. A recent experience has shown me there's more to maturity than a birthday and a checkbook.

Even after my eighteenth birthday, with all the freedom and responsibility it stood for, I still had to beg and plead with my mom to let me come home late on the weekends. I'd say "Mom, oh come on, Mom. Just once. It's a special game (or party)."

I always knew they were all the same and so did she. So once in a while she said "No."

I'd come back with a, "God. I'm so totally sure. Just this one time only and you say no. Well . . . I'm 18, so I'm going. I'm a legal adult."

And then she'd say, "As long as you live under my roof and I pay all the bills—you, Young Lady, better do as I say."

I'd just want to try my new freedom and her patience out, so I'd come home late anyway.

Once I did it too often. I came home at 3 a.m. instead of 12:30 and found my new suitcase awaiting me on the front porch—along with my checkbook that showed next to nothing in the bank. The door was locked and I had nowhere to go.

Having to rely on friends for a few days taught me that being 18 didn't mean I was an adult. Coming home late wasn't very mature. My mom said she didn't want me at home because she couldn't trust me. I'd thought I was on the top of the ladder and I found out I was on the bottom. I was where I once was when I was a freshman. But now I was a senior with freshman discipline.

Legal age doesn't mean anything. What is a checkbook with no money in the bank? What kind of freedom is it when you've no home to go home to?

Maturity takes trust, understanding, responsibility, determination, and dedication. Just being a given age doesn't give this. You have to be able to set your priorities and accept the consequences of living up to them.

I was in no way willing to get another job, move out by myself, pay for my own food, water, electricity and clothes and not have my mom to care about me. I thought I was somebody responsible, but I hadn't known who I was.

Convincing my mom to let me come home took some growing up. I had to leave that spoiled brat, inconsiderate me, and start working on being someone who cared about others and was willing to work together.

I'm home now, but I'm not really mature yet. Maybe no one ever is. I'll make more mistakes and have to learn more in the process.

18 . . . 36 . . . 52 . . . The entering into adulthood is a continuing process. Leaving one place to move on to another, hopefully better place, ends my story but starts another. Life is full of beginnings. And endings. And new beginnings. With each cycle there are risks involved, and disappointments. But then we learn something and start over again, never reaching the end, always learning more and more, continually growing towards adulthood and maturity.

The California Prompt Format

The writing prompts used in the California writing assessment are organized into two sections: The "Writing Situation" orients students to the special writing situations unique to the type of writing called for. Students are given back-

ground about the topic as well as any specific material they might need, such as a selection of literature, a photograph, or a chart. The occasion for writing is usually specified in this section, preparing students for an awareness of their intended readers.

In the second section, "Directions for Writing," students are given the specifics regarding the assignment's topic, intent, potential audience, and any other pertinent information for students to keep in mind when responding to the prompt.

In this guide the term *assignment* refers to assignments a teacher gives in the classroom, without the constraints of a testing situation, while the word *prompt* refers to the directions for a one-draft piece to be written in a prescribed time period.

Guidelines for Writing Prompts for Reflective Essay

The reflective essay requires a student to use a personal experience as an occasion for reflecting about a larger, more abstract idea or general condition. Occasions for reflections cover the range of personal experience, including observations of natural phenomena, recalling or witnessing events, or encountering a provocative idea in a novel or on the screen. The writer uses description and narration in communicating the experience. He or she then connects the experience with ideas about the writer's life in particular, as well as ideas of life in general.

Reflective writing is grounded in a concrete experience, like observational writing and autobiographical writing. Unlike these two forms of writing, however, reflective writing moves beyond description and narration to a different level of abstraction. It explores the connection between experience and ideas such as truth, beauty, patience, and injustice. In reflective essay, the writer may also connect personal experience and general social concepts about the way people think, behave, or interact.

Prompts for reflective essays may be one of two main types: (1) a prompt that provides or suggests the occasion for reflection or (2) a prompt that sets an abstract concept as a subject for the writer's reflection. In the first type of prompt, the occasion for writing may be a specific experience, such as a text or quotation provided in the prompt, or it may be a fairly general situation like "a time you saw two people arguing." In the second type of prompt the subject, such as "sportsmanship," is given, and the writer is asked to provide examples of personal experiences to support reflections on the subject.

Guidelines for drafting the writing situation and directions for writing for reflective essay prompts follow. Prompts that model these guidelines are included.

Writing Situation

Identify a particular text, quotation, or situation for the student, *or* identify a general subject for reflection. In one to four sentences, orient the student unmistakably to this occasion or subject for reflection.

In a separate brief paragraph of two or three sentences, establish a purpose for writing. Mention readers or identify a particular reader. It may be appropriate to identify a publication source or a specific use for the writing (e.g., school newspaper, sharing with other students). Ask the student to reflect on the occasion or subject, exploring his or her ideas about it.

Directions for Writing

Begin the directions, "Write a reflective essay about . . ." or "Write an essay reflecting on . . ." Mention the words *specific occasion, personal experience, connection, ideas,* or *concepts.* Avoid leading the student by suggesting other rhetorical features of reflection or suggesting how the essay may be organized.

Conclude the directions with sentences such as the following:. "You do not have to convince your readers that you are 'right.' You will be sharing your ideas, trying them out in an exploratory way."

Keep sentences relatively brief and vocabulary accessible. Title the prompt in a way that keeps students focused on the writing situation.

These guidelines should not constrain classroom assignments or student writing projects. Good classroom assignments and projects may share certain features of California prompts—purposefulness, specific readers, suggestions about strategies—but classroom assignments need not observe the constraints on test prompts.

These guidelines are designed solely to enable consultants to write prompts for the California writing assessment and are published here for teachers to use in constructing practice assessment prompts. They are in no way to be considered as alternatives to classroom essay assignments in which students move through many

stages—prewriting, drafting, revising, redrafting, editing, and publishing.

Reflecting About Compromises

Writing Situation. Sometimes we are not able to have our own way, and we are forced to make compromises. For example, you want to get a part-time job, but your parents say no because they are worried that your school work will suffer. You compromise by agreeing together that you can keep a part-time job so long as your grades do not go down. Compromise plays an important part in relationships and in our ability to "get along in the world." Some people refuse to compromise, while others compromise too easily.

Your English teacher has asked you to write a reflective essay exploring the subject of compromise. Think about specific occasions in your life when you were forced to compromise or when you observed someone else making a compromise.

Directions for Writing. Write a reflective essay about compromise. You might use your own experience or observations as a specific occasion for reflecting on your ideas. In your essay, explore whatever ideas occur to you about this subject. You do not have to convince your teacher that your ideas are "right." You will be sharing your ideas, trying them out in an exploratory way.

Reflecting on the American Market for Self-help Books

Writing Situation. Americans provide the largest market by far for self-help books. There are books on how to succeed in business, have a happy marriage, lose weight, raise a child, improve your tennis game, and many other subjects. People in other countries do not seem to share our great interest in these kinds of books.

Your English teacher has asked you to reflect on this American appetite for self-help books and to write an essay to share with your class. Think about what the large market for self-help books says about our society.

Directions for Writing. Write a reflective essay about the large market for self-help books in America. You might use your own experience with a self-help book as a specific occasion for reflecting on your ideas. In your essay, explore whatever ideas occur to you about this subject. You do not have to convince your teacher that your ideas are "right." You will be sharing your ideas, trying them out in an exploratory way.

Essays Written for the State Assessment

The essays included here were written as part of California's assessment of writing achievement.

High-range Achievement

This writer's detailed memory of a shopping trip with her grandmother provides the occasion that stimulates her reflections on words, and how they can be misunderstood, and then on happiness. The writer parallels this occasion with another illuminating event, her grandmother's account of her childhood. One of the subtle enhancements of this reflection arises from the way the writer parallels changes in her feelings with changes in the colors of the sky. While the focus of the reflection is personal, at key points it becomes general, illuminating the writer's understanding of her grandmother as well as of what happiness truly is.

I was ten years old. My grandmother walked by my side, holding me tightly by the hand. We moved slowly through the dense crowd and managed to arrive at the snack shop. She bought me a drink and we sat on a bench, by the door of the shop. I felt tired, my feet ached, my hand was numb from being squeezed.

I looked at my grandmother, who was fixing her big hat, and told her I wanted to go back home. A feeling of misery overwhelmed me, as her face turned very serious, a stern look in her eyes. I didn't know what to do or how to tell her that I really did appreciate her taking me to the amusement park; I was just tired. She misunderstood me and interpreted my wish to go home as lack of interest in her, as lack of love for her.

On the way home we kept silent. The only sound was the rattling of the engine. I kept thinking about how upset she was, and how helpless I felt.

Instead of going home, she took me to a park. The sky was starting to acquire the red shades of an approaching sunset. We sat on the grass, and I was happy when she suggested that I take off my shoes. I noticed that the severe attitude she had had at the amusement park had vanished. Instead, I sensed that she was sad. She began to tell me a story.

It was about a girl whose parents had died in the war, a girl who had never met her grandparents. She

had had to survive on her own, fight for food. The girl was my grandmother, who had been forced by her situation to grow up at an incredibly accelerated speed. She had almost missed her childhood. The sadness had now materialized into tears. I hugged her and cried with her.

I understood in a split second. I saw through her strength into her sadness, and I admired her. I had always thought of my grandmother as someone so strong, almost indestructible! I only had memories of her with a smile on her face, irradiating happiness. Now the sky was bright red, the sun an orange ball falling between the mountains. At that moment, I became aware that happiness is a state of mind. We can choose to be happy, or sad, regardless of the outside situation. I learned this from my grandmother, whom I will always remember as a strong woman, with a smile.

Mid-range Achievement

This mid-range achievement essay begins with a generalization but is grounded in the occasion of the writer's brief encounter with a girl. The writer is able to move from a personal experience directly to a reflective statement. What keeps it in the mid-level range is that it stops abruptly rather than exploring the idea generated by the encounter. It is, however, at the upper range of mid-level.

It never occurs to people just how many people are on Earth. It is impossible to comprehend all those people.

One time two summers ago I went to Marriot's Great America with some friends. We were having fun when I saw this girl looking at me. I didn't know how old she was, but she was very beautiful. We didn't know her name, but she had on a peach colored dress so one of my friends called her Peaches. I didn't have the nerve to go up and say something to her. All day we kept seeing her around and she was looking at me. I kept telling myself to go up and talk to her but kept backing down.

Finally, it was time to leave and I never talked to her. I still to this day feel bad about it and think about her.

It is kind of mind-boggling to think that I will never see her again, ever. It feels bizarre to think of all the people you once knew but will never see again. It makes me feel very mortal.

Low-range Achievement

In this essay, the writer recounts a brief occasion as the stimulus for his feeling of being "the luckiest person in the world." Although the writer does not explore or reflect further on this experience and the feelings it gives him, the reader has a definite sense of underdeveloped reflection. With the experienced classroom teacher providing options for development, this writer should be able to develop an idea more fully.

My truck, it is an old truck but a very nice truck. My truck is not a very small item, a matter of fact it is many thousands of Pound of Blue steel. I have had many feelings in my truck that I could not understand.

One of my many feelings or memories that I had was one cold morning that Todd and I where headed for Frenchmans lake about 5:00 am. Everything seemed so perfect. I had my truck, my Friend, and most of all, I was going to do what I do best, duck hunt.

The feeling was weird, I did not know how to interpret this feeling. The feeling gave me the feeling that I was the luckiest person in the world.

Published Examples of Reflective Writing

Reflection may be found in many different genres—fiction, poetry, the soliloquy in drama, and, of course, the essay. The first two examples of reflective writing, by Loren Eiseley and May Swenson, are poetic essays. "Strangers," by Cheryl Nelson, was written by a college freshman. "The Nature of It All" is an essay written by a teacher from a classroom experience; and the last is one of the classic reflective essays, "Death of a Moth" by Virginia Woolf.

The Face of the Lion[2]

by Loren Eiseley

The moth-eaten lion with shoe-button eyes
is lumpy by modern standards
and his mane

scarcely restorable.
I held him in my arms
when I was small.
I held him when my parents quarreled
as they did often while

I shrank away.
My beast has come
down the long traverse of such years and travel
as have left outworn or lost
beds slept in, women loved, hall clocks that struck

[2]Loren Eiseley, "The Face of the Lion," in *Notes of an Alchemist. Poems by Loren Eiseley.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972, pp. 23–25.

wrong hours,
photographs
in years forgotten, notes, lovers' quarrels, dear God
where go
our living hours,
upon what windy ash heaps are they kept?
Down what sepulchral chambers must we creep who
seek the past?
I who have dug through bones
and broken skulls and shards
into the farther deeps
rescind
such efforts now.
I cannot practice
the terrible archaeology of the brain
nor plumb
one simple childhood thought. I want no light to
shine
into those depths forever
but the lion
sits on the shelf above my desk
and I,
near-sighted now,
take comfort that he looks
forthright and bold
as when
my hands were small,
as when
my brain received him living,
something kind
where little kindness was.

The mirror tells me that my hair is grey
but the wild animist within my heart
refuses to acknowledge him a toy
given by someone long ago
forgotten.
No, no, the lion lives
and watches me
as I do him.
Should I forget
the hours in the blizzard dark,
the tears
spilled silent while I clutched his mane?
He is very quiet there upon the shelf,
as I am here, but we were silent
even then,
past words,
past time.
We waited for the light
and fell asleep when no light ever came
I do not
delude myself.
The lion's face is slowly changing
into the face of death
but when I lie down
upon my pillow
in the final hour
I shall lie quietly and clutch
the remnants of his mane.
It happens we have known
a greater dark together
he and I.
I am not terrified
if he has come
wearing another guise.
To him the watcher I will trust my sleep,
shoe-button eyes, the lion on the shelf.

The Key to Everything[3]

by May Swenson

Is there anything I can do
or has everything been done
or do

you prefer somebody else to do
it or don't
you trust me to do
it right or is it hopeless and no one can do
a thing or do
you suppose I don't
really want to do
it and am just saying that or don't
you hear me at all or what?

You're
waiting for
the right person the doctor or
the nurse the father or
the mother or
the person with the name you keep
mumbling in your sleep
that no one ever heard of there's no one
named that really
except yourself maybe

If I knew what the name was I'd
prove it's your own name
twisted in some way the one you
keep mumbling but you
won't tell me your
name or
don't you know it
yourself that's it
of course you've
forgotten or
never quite knew it or
weren't willing to believe it

Then there is something I
can do I
can find your name for you
that's the key to everything once you'd
repeat it clearly you'd
come awake you'd

[3]"The Key to Everything," by May Swenson. Copyright 1963 by May Swenson and renewed in 1982. Used with permission of The Literary Estate of May Swenson.

get up and walk knowing where you're

going where you
came from

And you'd
love me
after that or would you
hate me?
no once you'd
get there you'd
remember and love me
of course I'd
be gone by then I'd
be far away

Strangers[4]

by Cheryl Nelson

Strangers. I see strangers everywhere. Restaurants. Parks. Beaches. Walking through a shopping mall the unknown faces pass by like autumn leaves in a wind storm. Suddenly I see a face. I slow my walk and stare. Those eyes. That smile. The walk. I know the person. My gaze burns her skin and she turns to look at me. A stranger. We pass by each other. Turning my head I watch and wonder. Who does she remind me of? Someone I met while traveling in Europe? A face from my collegiate past? A relative? I do not know. We are strangers.

At a cousin's wedding the relatives converge. My mother talks with her cousins and aunts. We children stand awkwardly along the wall, watching and trying not to look bored. A lady walks over to us and hugs each of us—Great-aunt Ella. A dear Norwegian lady who remembers our names in the right order. We briefly chat until we're interrupted by a girl's voice calling Great-aunt Ella away. Later we ask mother who the girl was. Our cousin. Strangers. We are related by common blood, but the blood is not thick enough. We are strangers.

Moments like these are puzzling and embarrassing. Unfamiliar people who look like a friend or former lover. Nonexistent relatives appearing in flesh and blood. Strangers. There's another experience just as baffling when an honest-to-God friend becomes, for just an instant, a stranger.

Karl and I had known each other for a couple of years and had spent lots of serious time together for several months. We decided to go for a cycle ride on country roads very late one night. We drove for miles and ended up by a lake. He knew of a trail onto the peninsula and started out. I held tight. Rocks poked up threatening to tip us over. He was steady.

At the end of the trail a campfire was smoldering. We sat down and quietly looked at the coals. I glanced at him as the reddish light cast shadows on his face. His hair was blown and his eyes intense. Suddenly I felt as though I were sitting with a stranger. The transformation lasted only a few very short seconds, but in that time I didn't recognize him. I saw only our differences and couldn't figure out how we'd gotten there. He had his drinking buddies; I had my Bible Study friends. He went hunting and fishing; I went to plays and classical music concerts. He rebuilt a car; I tried to write poems. I was confused. There sat a stranger. His black hair, deep set eyes, full moustache and muscled arms made him appear very mysterious and secretive. Who was this man who was so determined to prove himself that he started raising pigs, when most farmers were struggling to survive, and made it? Who was this person who probably read more books than I and remembered them? Who was this shadow of his father whom I'd grown to love and respect? I didn't know him.

Then another transformation occurred. He was still a stranger, but it wasn't a distant, cold stranger. It was the part in all of us that remains a stranger, hidden from others for protection and safe-keeping. I seemed to be seeing deep inside his soul. I saw the shadow of what was attracting me to him lurking somewhere in the depths of his eyes. Our differences disappeared and I felt incredibly close to him. I felt that if I touched him at that moment I would be transported to another world, his world, and changed internally forever. He stared into the dying coals and seemed to be communicating with them. I didn't know him, and yet I felt incredibly omniscient. The feeling was so fantastic. He was a stranger, yet I knew him. He was so distant, yet I somehow felt we were connected as one.

The spell was broken by chirping crickets and croaking frogs. A few stars were poking through the clouds as the moon reflected off the water. He looked at me and said we had to go. I doubt he even knew what had just transpired. In that campfire there was magic. I can still see his face and feel the distance and closeness I felt towards him then. I wonder still what it was that drew us together and what it is that continues to sustain our friendship. What is it that determines which of us will remain strangers and which will become friends? A face in a crowd appears as a friend, but is not. A relative we should know remains distantly unfamiliar. A close friend suddenly becomes a stranger. Strangers. Aren't we all?

The Nature of It All[5]

by Joan Brown

The caterpillars in my classroom have shed their skins now, chrysalizing into jade, gold-rimmed jew-

[4]Cheryl Nelson, "Strangers," in *Active Voices IV*. Edited by James Moffett. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1986, pp. 302–303.

[5]Joan Brown, "The Nature of It All." Unpublished essay, 1990.

els that hang tenuously from the rusty aquarium screen. Though I've seen monarchs through their cycles several times now, I've never seen them actually "DO" the chrysalizing process before. It always was at night, or while I was away that these jewels would magically appear, like gifts beneath the tree on Christmas morning.

At first, when I would find them, the jade green would be translucent, and I could see inside the pale-grayed outline of the yellow-black striped caterpillar. I wondered often at their way, the quiet decorum of encasing themselves in such a jewel where, in modesty and in such peace, they would transform. How unlike us, I'd think, pondering on the twelve-year-old stranger, once my son—now a changing mass of seething hormones. It seems so much more seemly, the monarch way, so peaceful and so natural.

Well, this week that illusion died, as in my classroom, right before us all, we voyeured on this change.

It was as we read from Oedipus that in the front corner of the room the student squirming started. Attention was re-focused as the caterpillar hanging from the screen began to shake—a violent and spasmodic motion, first side to side, then coiling up—"U-ing" his body and then dropping down again into a "J."

We watched in awe his frenetic and ungainly struggle, and only gradually became aware that in these instinctive and convulsive spasms he appeared to be shaking himself out of his skin while simultaneously he disappeared, from bottom up, into a viscous jade-green gem.

I stood there stunned, paralyzed by the raw violence of what I had always thought to be such a modest, civilized procedure. I saw the outline faint within, still vibrating and jerking—less violently now, as if somehow building up the jade-green from inside. And then the movement stopped—and that, for now, was all.

Is this then metamorphosis—a nausea—a lurching active spasm to throw off all of the old—a hanging bare before the world, waiting, trusting, being—knowing that growth and change inevitably will occur? Is this then finally the only way the butterfly can learn to be?

One of the classic reflective essays is Virginia Woolf's "The Death of a Moth." The following introduction is from *Reading Critically, Writing Well*, by Rise Axelrod and Charles R. Cooper, St. Martin's Press.

As the title suggests, this essay was occasioned by an incident that the writer observed. Ordinary events like this usually go unnoticed, but when they catch a writer's eye, they often lead to reflections. What is interesting is not the fact that Woolf derives from the incident a reflective essay about death but how she writes this essay. As a novelist, Woolf was critical of discursive essayists whom she said "scold" readers. Her goal was to "sting us awake" by presenting the incident vividly and dramatically. Instead of discussing the event, she develops her controlling idea primarily through description and contrast. As you read, notice how much space Woolf devotes to showing the scene as opposed to telling the reader what she is thinking or feeling.

The Death of a Moth[6]

by Virginia Woolf

Moths that fly by day are not properly to be called moths; they do not excite that pleasant sense of dark autumn nights and ivy-blossom which the commonest yellow-underwing asleep in the shadow of the curtain never fails to rouse in us. They are hybrid creatures, neither gay like butterflies nor sombre like their own species. Nevertheless the present specimen, with his narrow hay-coloured wings, fringed with a tassel of the same colour, seemed to be content with life. It was a pleasant morning, mid-September, mild, benign, yet with a keener breath than that of the summer months. The plough was already scoring the field opposite the window, and where the share had been, the earth was pressed flat and gleamed with moisture. Such vigour came rolling in from the fields and the down beyond that it was difficult to keep the eyes strictly turned upon the book. The rooks too were keeping one of their annual festivities; soaring round the tree tops until it looked as if a vast net with thousands of black knots in it had been cast up into the air; which, after a few moments sank slowly down upon the trees until every twig seemed to have a knot at the end of it. Then, suddenly, the net would be thrown into the air again in a wider circle this time, with the utmost clamour of vociferation, as though to be thrown into the air and settle slowly down upon the tree tops were a tremendously exciting experience.

The same energy which inspired the rooks, the ploughmen, the horses, and even, it seemed, the lean bare-backed downs, sent the moth fluttering from side to side of his square of the window-pane. One could not help watching him. One was, indeed, conscious of a queer feeling of pity for him. The possibilities of pleasure seemed that morning so enormous and so various that to have only a moth's part in life, and a day moth's at that, appeared a hard fate, and his zest in enjoying his meagre opportunities to the full pathetic. He flew vigorously to one corner of his compartment, and, after waiting there a second, flew across to the other. What remained for him but to fly to a third corner and then to a fourth? That was all he

[6]Virginia Woolf, "The Death of a Moth," in *Collected Essays, Volume 1*. New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1967.

could do, in spite of the size of the downs, the width of the sky, the far-off smoke of houses, and the romantic voice, now and then, of a steamer out at sea. What he could do he did. Watching him, it seemed as if a fibre, very thin but pure, of the enormous energy of the world had been thrust into his frail and diminutive body. As often as he crossed the pane, I could fancy that a thread of vital light became visible. He was little or nothing but life.

Yet, because he was so small, and so simple a form of the energy that was rolling in at the open window and driving its way through so many narrow and intricate corridors in my own brain and in those of other human beings, there was something marvelous as well as pathetic about him. It was as if someone had taken a tiny bead of pure life and decking it as lightly as possible with down and feathers, had set it dancing and zigzagging to show us the true nature of life. Thus displayed one could not get over the strangeness of it. One is apt to forget all about life, seeing it humped and bossed and garnished and cumbered so that it has to move with the greatest circumspection and dignity. Again, the thought of all that life might have been had he been born in any other shape caused one to view his simple activities with a kind of pity.

After a time, tired by his dancing apparently, he settled on the window ledge in the sun, and, the queer spectacle being at an end, I forgot about him. Then, looking up, my eye was caught by him. He was trying to resume his dancing, but seemed either so stiff or so awkward that he could only flutter to the bottom of the window-pane; and when he tried to fly across it he failed. Being intent on other matters I watched these futile attempts for a time without thinking, unconsciously waiting for him to resume his flight, as one waits for a machine that has stopped momentarily, to start again without considering the reason of its failure. After perhaps a seventh attempt he slipped from the wooden ledge and fell, fluttering his wings, onto his back on the window sill. The helplessness of his attitude roused me. It flashed upon me he was in difficulties; he could no longer raise himself; his legs struggled vainly. But, as I stretched out a pencil, meaning to help him to right himself, it came over me that the failure and awkwardness were the approach of death. I laid the pencil down again.

The legs agitated themselves once more. I looked as if for the enemy against which he struggled. I looked out of doors. What had happened there? Presumably it was midday, and work in the fields had stopped. Stillness and quiet had replaced the previous animation. The birds had taken themselves off to feed in the brooks. The horses stood still. Yet the power was there all the same, massed outside indifferent, impersonal, not attending to anything in particular. Somehow it was opposed to the little hay-coloured moth. It was useless to try to do anything. One could only watch the extraordinary efforts made by those tiny legs against an oncoming doom which could, had it chosen, have submerged an entire city, not merely a city, but masses of human beings; nothing, I knew, had any chance against death. Nevertheless after a pause of exhaustion the legs fluttered again. It was superb, this last protest, and so frantic that he succeeded at last in righting himself. One's sympathies, of course, were all on the side of life. Also, when there was nobody to care or to know, this gigantic effort on the part of an insignificant little moth, against a power of such magnitude, to retain what no one else valued or desired to keep, moved one strangely. Again, somehow, one saw life, a pure bead. I lifted the pencil again, useless though I knew it to be. But even as I did so, the unmistakable tokens of death showed themselves. The body relaxed, and instantly grew stiff. The struggle was over. The insignificant little creature now knew death. As I looked at the dead moth, this minute wayside triumph of so great a force over so mean an antagonist filled me with wonder. Just as life had been strange a few minutes before, so death was now as strange. The moth having righted himself now lay most decently and uncomplainingly composed. O yes, he seemed to say, death is stronger than I am.

Recommended Readings of the Reflective Essay

Reflective essays range from the philosophical treatise to magazine and newspaper columns reflecting on everything from freedom to love to winning and losing a ball game. Students can find reflective essays on nearly any topic they are interested in by referencing subject matter rather than genre. Reflective thinking figures heavily in poetry and fiction as well as in essays. As students begin to be familiar with the characteristics of reflection, they should have no trouble identifying passages or works that are largely reflective.

The following works are listed merely as indications for teachers of some of the reflective essays that the development team felt represented excellent examples of this kind of writing. The list is in no way intended to be complete; it is quite idiosyncratic, as are most book lists by teachers.

Aurelius, Marcus. *Meditations*. New York: Viking-Penguin, Inc., 1964.

Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987.

Conroy, Frank. *Stop-Time*. New York: Viking-Penguin, Inc., 1977.

de Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. New York: Doubleday & Co., 1969.

Didion, Joan. *Slouching Towards Bethlehem.* New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968.
Didion, Joan. *The White Album.* New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968.
Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek* . New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1974.
Eiseley, Loren. *The Immense Journey.* New York: Random House, Inc., 1959.
Eiseley, Loren. *The Star Thrower.* Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1979.
Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Self-Reliance,* and others. Two Rivers, Wisc.: Peter Pauper, 1967.
Forster, E.M. *Abinger Harvest* (1966) and *Two Cheers for Democracy.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1962.
Frank, Anne. *The Diary of a Young Girl.* Various editions.
Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies* (Simon's understanding). New York: Putnam Publishing Group, n.d.
Houston, Jeanne, and James Houston. *Farewell to Manzanar.* Boston: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, Inc., 1973.
Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World* (last chapter). New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1979.
Lindbergh, Anne Morrow. *Gift from the Sea.* New York: Random House, Inc., 1977.
Lopez, Barry. *River Notes* and *Desert Notes.* New York: Avon Books, 1979.
Montaigne. *Essays.* Various editions.
Orwell, George. *Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters.* Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968.
St. Augustine. *The Confessions of Augustine, Books I–VII.* Salem, N.H.: Ayer Co. Publishers, Inc., 1979.
Thomas, Lewis. *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher.* New York: Viking Press, 1974.
Thomas, Lewis. *The Medusa and the Snail: More Notes of a Biology Watcher.* New York: Viking-Penguin, Inc., 1979.
Thomas, Lewis. *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony.* New York: Viking Press, 1983.
Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971.
Truth, Sojourner. "Ain't I a Woman?" From *Narrative of Sojourner Truth.* Salem, N.H.: Ayer Co. Publishers, Inc., 1968.
Voltaire, M. Francois. *Candide.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
Welty, Eudora. *One Writer's Beginnings.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983.
White, E.B. *The Essays of E.B. White.* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1941.
White, E.B. *One Man's Meat.* New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1939.
Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own.* Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1929.
Other Sources of Reflective Essays
The New Yorker
The Atlantic
Harper's Magazine

Reflective Essay

Reflective essays derive from the personal experience of the writer. But beyond the description and narration involved in communicating that experience, reflection requires probing into what this experience can show about the writer's life in particular and, more importantly, about the writer's ideas of life in general.

The writer of a reflective essay works to see connections between experience and ideas, to test out thinking about an idea in the light of other experiences, and to arrive at new dimensions of the initial thinking.

Reflective essays are grounded in the concrete. An ordinary thing seen, read, or experienced triggers the reflection and leads to exploration of an idea. Occasions for reflections cover the range of personal experience from observations of natural phenomena, to recalling or witnessing events or to encountering a provocative idea in a novel or on the screen.

While the *rhetorical* aspect of the assessment focuses on the distinctive features of writing types, the *effectiveness* aspect guides us to look carefully at the more comprehensive features of coherence and style. Coherence, a sense of organization, flow, and focus, is essential to all good writing. The coherent essay has a clear direction, each section flowing naturally from the preceding one. Coherence is demonstrated to readers through emphasis, organization, and repetition achieved through recurrences of language, syntax, and ideas. Style, for the purposes of this assessment, is observable in two written language features: (1) *sentence control* and (2) *word choice* or *diction*. In assessing the effectiveness of style, the primary considerations are *appropriateness, precision,* and *control*.

Unlike observational writing, which focuses on conveying one's personal perceptions, or autobiographical incident, which involves narrating an incident and evaluating its significance, reflective essays move to a different level of abstraction. The writer of a reflective essay ultimately reveals that the subject of the essay is, in fact, an abstraction, such as truth, beauty, patience, injustice. Reflective writers explore the meaning of this abstraction for themselves and for people in general. It is this people-in-general aspect of reflection—exploring the larger social implications of an idea—that is the hallmark of the reflective essay. It involves students in a unique kind of experience-based thinking.

The flow of thinking in exploring an idea may take shapes such as the following:

- The writer may first present the occasion (narrate a full incident or describe an observation), choosing details and images carefully as a way to ground the reflection that follows. The reflection then moves off on its own, perhaps with some reference to the initiating occasion.
- The writer may launch an occasion but then move in and out of it along the way, reflecting on the idea it suggests.
- The writer may construct a web of related, often parallel experiences that serve as the stimulus for reflection.
- The writer may focus first on a single occasion and then draw associations between it and other related experiences that build to an ultimate idea about people or the world at large.
- The writer may begin with an idea from a quotation, proverb, or general experience and test concrete personal experience against it, reflecting about how each experience relates to the idea. The reflection is refined more fully with each example until the idea has been tested from various angles.

Whatever thought pattern emerges, the writer's reflections explore the meaning of the occasion beyond the personal to the general.

Students who lack experience reading and writing the reflective essay usually respond in limited ways to prompts: (1) they fail to ground their reflections in concrete observations or personal anecdotes or do so only superficially and then write a conventional "expository" essay about the idea in the topic; (2) they narrate a rele-

vant personal experience but then neglect to explore the idea it suggests or do so only briefly, often in a moralizing way; or (3) they write a meditation rather than a reflection, turning an idea over and over but not grounding their ideas in personal experience.

Score Point 6 – Exceptional Achievement

Occasion for Reflection. The writer of a six-point essay memorably presents the occasion for reflection (a thing seen, read, or experienced), often with the fine detail of the naturalist or autobiographer. Though it does not dominate the essay at the expense of reflection, the occasion is nevertheless presented in extended, concrete detail. Whether it be an anecdote or an observation of nature or a literary text, the occasion grounds the entire essay in concrete experience.

Writers of six-point essays may use such strategies as the following to ground their reflections:

- Describe an animal, object, or phenomenon, using concrete language rich in sensory detail.
- Record specific behaviors, properties, or actions, often using narrative strategies such as pacing, dialogue, or movement.
- Cite a quotation—poetry, prose, or proverb.
- Construct a web of related, often parallel experiences that serve as the stimulus for reflection.

Reflection. In a six-point essay the reflection or the idea suggested by the occasion is exceptionally thoughtful and convincing. The reader is impressed by particular insights. The writer is clearly thinking freshly, originally, and honestly about the idea and has left commonplaces and cliches behind. The reflection tends to be extended, reflecting a serious, almost tenacious, probing and exploring of the idea.

The reflection may include generalizations about the writer's personal experience (signaled by "I" and "my") or more abstract commentary (signaled by "people," "they," and the editorial "we") about the idea and its broader implications. (For brevity's sake, these two types of reflections can be referred to as *personal reflection* and *general reflection.*)

Personal reflection may be understood as the first step away from narration of personal experience toward the reflective essay's characteristic idea abstraction of general reflection. Most essays scored six will have some explicit, insightful general reflection. In some notable papers, however, the writer's presentation of the occasion is at the same time a reflection. In these papers the general reflection is implicit, embedded in phrases or clauses that cue the reader to move beyond the specific occasion to the abstraction that underlies it. The tone, established by a distancing of self from occasion, clearly conveys the reflective nature of such essays. Though exploratory, the reflection seems to find a direction and reveals discovery or deepening insight, sometimes expressed as wonder, without a sense of conclusiveness.

The six-point essay shows the writer's exceptional control of a range of sentence structures. These writers consistently use language with precision, appropriateness, and imagination, drawing on specific concrete language, sensory description, and details to draw the reader into the exploration.

Score Point 5 – Commendable Achievement

Occasion for Reflection. Like a six-point essay, the five-point essay presents an extended concrete occasion. The occasion does not dominate the essay at the expense of reflection. A five-point essay lacks only the vividness and impact of a six-point essay.

Reflection. The writer engages in extended, thoughtful reflection. As in a six-point essay, the writer includes at least some general reflection. The occasional five-point essay establishes a reflective tone by an effective distancing of self from the occasion. The five-point essay, however, will not carry it through so conclusively. The personal reflection and general reflection are serious and honest but lack the intellectual leaps and freshness of a six-point essay. The essay reaches beyond obvious statements about the occasion and idea. The reflection is not entirely predictable.

A five-point essay shows the writer's ability to use words appropriately. Word choice may show less versatility and imagination than in the six-point essay; however, the diction is still consistently strong and controlled. The writer exhibits sustained control of a variety of sentence structures, and the essay reveals direction or purpose, although without the insight of the six-point essay.

Score Point 4 – Adequate Achievement

Occasion for Reflection. The four-point essay presents a concrete occasion but may lack the detail or specificity of a five- or six-point essay. The language, though appropriate, may be somewhat conventional and predictable. A full-fledged incident may dominate the reflection. It strikes the reader as a strong and interesting occasion.

Reflection. Reflection will indicate a serious attempt to explore the idea suggested by the occasion but may be less well grounded in that specific occasion. Some details may seem extraneous, interrupting the forward exploratory movement of the essay. The essay shows a sustained control of sentence structure, but it may have less variety than the five- or six-point essays. The reflection may be intelligent but predictable or commonplace. The connection may seem tangential. The writer may rely on personal reflections about the occasion but will still include at least a brief general reflection. A four-point essay may be characterized by thoughtfulness rather than by discovery.

Score Point 3 – Some Evidence of Achievement

Occasion. The writer presents an occasion, but it may either be brief or dominate the essay. What appear at first reading to be occasions may actually be examples chosen to illustrate an initial generalization. The writer may rely on general rather than specific language.

Reflection. The essay may have a meandering, rather than purposefully exploratory, quality. Although the reader can understand the major ideas, there may be irrelevant details, digressions, and/or repetitions. The three-point essay may rely on personal reflection to the the exclusion of general reflection. Reflection will seem obvious or even superficial, often taking the form of moralizing.

Some three-point essays will offer only extended reflection about the idea in the prompt, with little grounding in an occasion. The essay may seem generally competent and the reflection may be as interesting as in a four- or five-point essay, but the writer has not yet learned that reflection must be carefully grounded in an occasion.

Other three-point essays will begin with what sounds like the end point of reflection, a conclusion or generalization that becomes the stimulus for recounting one or more illustrative examples.

Score Point 2 – Little Evidence of Achievement

Occasion. The occasion may be brief or it may dominate the essay. There may be no occasion or the essay may be all occasion, with little reflection.

Reflection. If there is an occasion, the reflection may be additive or unfocused. It may be very brief and simplistic, and some details are irrelevant. The overall structure of the essay is weak. Some two-point essays may be extended personal or generalized reflections on a topic with no grounding at all in an occasion. The writer exhibits little control of sentence structure, and the word choice is limited. Some words may be inappropriate or inappropriately used.

Score Point 1 – Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Occasion. If there is an occasion, it will be very brief and devoid of specificity or concreteness.

Reflection. No reflection is indicated. There may be brief and superficial attempts at definition or statements of opinion rather than reflection. The paper lacks organization, and there are frequent lapses in sentence sense, resulting in confusion for the reader.

Unscorable – Inappropriate Response

Off topic. No response. Written in a foreign language.

High School Writing Guide

Report of Information

An effective report of information conveys information accurately and convincingly, serving several closely related purposes: to increase readers' knowledge of a subject; to help readers better understand a procedure or process; or to provide readers with an enhanced comprehension of a concept or idea. Writers of reports of information collect, synthesize, and organize the results of their investigation and present their findings as objectively as possible. Their research may include material from both firsthand and secondhand sources.

The process of gathering and reporting information, central to report of information, is basic to other types of writing. Observational writing, for example, depends on the same procedures but focuses on the writer's particular perception of firsthand impressions.

Importance of Report of Information

Reporting information is the fundamental task of much published writing. Journalism; technical writing; court depositions; textbooks; expository essays; research, lab, and weather reports; and even phone messages all attempt to convey knowledge to an audience that wants or needs to understand something. For example, the writing guides represent an effort to report to teachers the findings of the development team. Team members have collected information from research, from student writing, and from their own and colleagues' classroom experiences and tried to organize all of their information in an efficient way.

Readers go to consumer reports, newspapers, handbooks, and training manuals to elicit information quickly and easily. Anyone who has become confused while trying to follow poorly written voting instructions on a ballot form or given up in frustration after struggling to assemble components for a radio-VCR-compact disc player-television unit knows how important it is for writers to be accurate and clear in presenting new information.

Teaching students to synthesize information from a variety of sources deserves high priority in subjects across the curriculum. Students who can use the resources of magazines, books, computer data banks, and community experts to communicate the results of their research will have greater success when they move to the more complex tasks of interpretation or speculation.

They will be better able to evaluate the reporting of others, as well. Learning how to employ the strategies of effective research and reporting is certainly one of the key goals of education as well as one of the primary requirements of workers in government, business, and industry.

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Characteristics of Report of Information

The main purpose in writing a report of information is to present information clearly and succinctly to an identified audience. Report writers convey information directly; they do not attempt to persuade readers, to validate opinions, or to argue in favor of a specific viewpoint. The primary characteristics of an effective report of information form the basis of both teaching and evaluating this kind of writing:

- A clearly articulated *controlling idea*
- *Elaborated support* of the controlling idea
- An *organized pattern of development*
- Evidence of an *authoritative and consistent stance*

Controlling Idea

The controlling idea is the writer's primary concern and determines the writer's choice of points for elaboration. While the controlling idea may be either directly stated or implied, it will be clear to the careful reader. The controlling idea may convey the writer's point of view by the writer's choice of elements or by the writer's organizational approach to the subject, but the controlling idea itself will be presented clearly and objectively.

Elaborated Support

The most successful reports of information rely on a variety of elaboration strategies, providing carefully selected examples, facts, and details. The following strategies are useful in elaborating information:

- Naming, describing, or differentiating parts
- Demonstrating claims or assertions
- Comparing or contrasting with other subjects
- Examining the history of a subject
- Narrating a relevant anecdote
- Narrating the process of making, using, or participating in a subject
- Explaining the benefits or limitations of a subject
- Providing a scenario to illustrate a point
- Indicating facts about or qualities of a subject

Organized Pattern of Development

The organization of a report of information depends on the content, the writer's purpose, and the intended audience. Writers may organize the information using any governing framework, such as chronological or historical, specific to general, general to specific, causal, or sequential. The writer of a report of information attempts to enable readers to follow the pattern of development easily as they read to understand and remember key points. Organization in the best reports will seem to be almost inevitable, arising from the writers' carefully focused goals.

Stance

The writer of a report of information conveys a sense of authority about the subject, selecting an audience, then choosing a pattern of organization and elements for elaboration. This stance, or attitude toward the subject and audience, remains stable throughout the report. Through consistency and authority, the writer conveys a sense of commitment to the sharing of information.

Exemplary Student Essay

Michelle Kasik's essay "The Harlem Renaissance" is exemplary as a type of report of information that is commonly assigned in school. Like the writers of the literary movement she chronicles, Kasik rises above the stereotypic report to convey the spirit and talent of three black poets who emerged during the 1920s as symbols of the black jazz and poetry uprising.

Her essay opens with a strong controlling thesis with supporting data. In paragraph two, she introduces the three major poets who illustrate the dominant power of the movement, allowing them to provide the organizational pattern of the report. In elaborating on each of these poets, Kasik selects details that are cogent and particular; the poets emerge as clearly defined individuals, even in this brief essay. The report is effectively framed by placing the movement in historical perspective.

Following the essay is an account of the process Kasik went through in order to produce this exemplary report.

The Harlem Renaissance

From the heart of New York City's most impoverished ghetto, Harlem, came a group of young black

writers who rose above the squalor, prejudice, and despair that surrounded them to take part in one of the most important movements in twentieth century American literature—the Harlem Renaissance. The Renaissance had its roots in the great migration after the Civil War; tens of thousands of freed slaves moved North, searching for a better life but finding only crowded tenements, low-paying jobs, and the scorn of the northerners. These writers and poets, among them Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Claude McKay, began for the first time to write not only about the pride they had in themselves and in their blackness, but about their continuing struggle against the white oppression that kept them poor, hungry, and segregated.

With his angry poem about racial violence and tension "If We Must Die," author Claude McKay became the first recognized poet of the Harlem Renaissance. Although born and raised in Jamaica, he spent much of his adult life in Harlem writing bitter poetry about American culture and its views on blacks. As a champion of Marcus Garvey and his Back to Africa movement, McKay composed many poems that were reminiscent of the land of black forefathers and the freedom that could be had there. "The Tropics in New York," a poem written in 1924, contains both of his prevalent themes, homesickness and oppression. In it, he conveys how the sight and smell of lush ripening fruit on a windowsill make him long for the beauty and freedom of his home, while the tall white buildings and crowds trap him in a box of color, making it hard for him to breathe.

Like Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, easily the best-known author of the Harlem Renaissance, also wrote poems about racism and its effects on black life. While McKay used the lush, tropical sights and sounds of a jungle to relay the feelings of oppression, Hughes gave his poems the jazz and blues rhythms that could be heard at any hour on the streets of Harlem. As exemplified in his poem "Motto," Langston Hughes' works have the distinct beat and flavour of the people he was surrounded by every day:

I play it cool
and dig all jive.
That's how I've
stayed alive.
My motto is
as I live and learn,
dig and be dug
in return.

With his street talk and funky beats, he was able to capture his readers' or listeners' attention long enough to deliver his real message—equality. He describes a strong and proud black race, ready to take its place next to its white brothers at the dinner table, or in America, in his poem "I, Too, Sing America."

Countee Cullen, unlike his Harlem contemporaries McKay and Hughes, has a reputation for using friendship, nature, and romance as themes for poems instead of prejudice and equality. Although Cullen is best known for his lyrical love poems (in the tradition of Byron and Shelley) several of his most poignant works deal with his experiences as a black child visiting in the South. In one poem he tells of his extensive journeys through Maryland and his recollection of seeing only one sight: a young white boy sticking out his tongue and saying "Nigger." While more sensitive and less abrasive than his fellow poets, Cullen still manages to show, through the use of a small boy, the hurt and humiliation of being rejected because of one's color.

The racism and oppression of blacks in the 1920s was dealt with in many ways by the poets of the Harlem Renaissance: with anger and violence by Claude McKay, sharp jazzy wit by Langston Hughes, and a scared boy's memories by Countee Cullen; yet each poet seems to convey the one dominant message—prejudice, segregation, and hate are wrong and unjust.

On Black Thursday, October 24, 1929, the stock market crash plummeted the nation into a decade of depression. With millions out of work and starving, no one had the time or energy to devote to the arts, leaving the Harlem writers forgotten and unproductive. Although the Renaissance lasted only a decade, it left its influence on generations of blacks (including Richard Wright and James Baldwin) and whites alike.

One Student's Writing Process

Strategies Michelle Kasik used in writing the report on the Harlem Renaissance are detailed here. Included are samples of her prewriting activities as well as written responses from a student in her writing group.

Invention

First, the teacher asked the class to list subjects that the students had some knowledge of already, subjects that they would be interested in writing about and that they thought other students would be interested in reading. The teacher has ensured that a potential audience is part of the initial conception of the writing.

Notice that two of the subjects on Michelle Kasik's list—with strong possibilities starred—stem from the 1920s; both are accompanied by specific names, even in this first listing.

* *Elvis Presley—death, life, funeral*
Yugoslavia
music

* *Harlem school of writers—Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen 1920s*
  GWTW (Gone with the Wind) Leslie Howard, Cukor, Victor Fleming? O'Selznick, Maureen O'Sullivan
* *Van Gogh, Vincent (crossed out)*
* *Dada Movement—Marcel Duchamp, readymades, Max Ernst, Man Ray 1920's*
  Henry the Eighth

Choosing a Subject

Next, the teacher asked students to extend two or three possibilities and briefly explore angles they might want to report on. Note that Kasik, in writing notes about her second possibility, the Elvis phenomenon, moves toward speculation rather than reporting:

#1: Harlem Renaissance—new wave of literature, first-time recognition for blacks—stories—colorful while showing the depression that was prevalent in the ghettos (Harlem)
#2: Why the Elvis phenomenon? His life, music...why affected so many people. Why people won't let him die, feel he still might be alive, couldn't cope with life

Finding Out What You Already Know

In this section, Kasik, directed to write down what she already knows about her choice (the Harlem Renaissance), simply listed facts that she remembered about the movement:

1. *1920s ended before depression*
2. *Reasons why: move North, no money, poverty, sudden freedom, able to express pride*
3. *Langston Hughes—Dig all jive—main poet*
4. *Claude McKay—started in Jamaica Banana Bottom—hard life*
5. *Influences: Paul Laurence Dunbar, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Dubois*
6. *Countee Cullen—sensitive yet profound*
7. *Wrote about racism, parity*
8. *Sudden popularity of being black w/carefree twenties*
9. *They influenced James Baldwin, Richard Wright*
10. *Cullen and McKay slipped into oblivion*
11. *Sudden political involvement in DuBois, Garvey*
12. *Just ended—there, with few exceptions, has never been anything like it yet*
13. *"I play it cool and dig all jive, that's how I stay alive—As I live and learn Dig and be dug in return"*
    "If we Must Die"
    –first poem of the Harlem Renaissance
    I. Introduction
    A. Beginnings of Harlem Renaissance
    B. Why? Who? What? Where?

What else do I know? Countee Cullen—called "nigger" by a child while traveling. Stayed with him always... poem. Langston Hughes—most famous, continued to write after H.R. ended. Essay on how it was an insult to be called a black writer, he was just a writer. "I dig all jive," "I, too, sing America." Claude McKay—poor Jamaican. Travelled extensively through Europe. Was sarcastic, biting. "Tropics in New York."

Writing on the Topic in General

Following these notes, Kasik did a quickwrite on the topic in general, a kind of overview of the subject. For a quickwrite, students are encouraged to write quickly and freely, paying no attention to spelling, punctuation, or sentence structure:

After the Civil War tens of thousands of newly freed blacks migrated to the large northern cities to find the work that did not exist in the south (this end is not necessary).

WWI made them feel independent; they began showing pride in themselves.
Much of the HR was about the extreme poverty and despair that people lived in. Racism—it was the first time blacks talked like blacks in books.
With the start of the depression the HR ended abruptly to be revived shortly by Wright and Baldwin, but it never had the momentum it did.

Analyzing Readers

Before continuing, students stopped to reconsider the audience they were writing for. Michelle Kasik wrote about her high school readers:

What do they know?
Not much, probably heard the name Langston Hughes, read a few of his poems, maybe know about Wright and Baldwin—maybe thought they were part of the school.

What might they want to know?
If they know about Wright and Baldwin might want to know who their influences were. Why it was so short and never revived. Any general details since they most likely won't know much info—should be short, not too much centering on bios—would want

to read some of the poetry and why they are important...how poverty and racism influenced them...

Kasik continued to think about her subject and made extensive notes about each of the poets and about the Harlem Renaissance movement before writing her first draft. This draft, one page of which appears on the following page in her own hand, was then duplicated for members of her writing group (see Figure 4). Clearly, Kasik is an experienced reviser.

Writing Group Response

After an extended class discussion about the characteristics of a good report of information, the instructor provided guidelines for written responses from members of the writing group. Here is one student's response to Kasik's first draft. Each response is preceded by the identifying criterion.

Identification of Subject. Has the writer sufficiently narrowed and identified the subject? If not, tell the writer how he or she might refocus the subject so that it might be more interesting.

Kelly Cooper: I understand that you are talking about the writers of the Harlem Renaissance—this is very clear, but how many writers do you plan on talking about? You might want to mention early the ones you'll be focusing on.

Thesis. Does the writer have a thesis or a controlling purpose? In your own words, say what you think it is. Give the writer any suggestions that might help the writer identify the thesis or controlling purpose.

Kelly: The thesis is a little cloudy. In your 1st paragraph, you mention something about their living conditions, the prejudice, and you sort of name-drop "The Harlem Renaissance." If you could incorporate these things into one sentence at the end of the 1st paragraph, before you delve into the writers, maybe that would be the one clarifying stab it needs. I do need something like that before you jump to the writers; that threw me.

Organization. Has the writer organized the presentation of information? Does the organization seem reasonable? Give the writer any suggestions as to how the information could be presented in a more effective order.

Kelly: Your organization is fine, by author. It works.

Transitions. Has the writer provided transitions? Identify places where the writer seems to jump from one subject to another. Were the transitions smooth or did they seem mechanical?

Kelly: I really have no *problem with your transition, they are so good, I don't even recognize that they* are *transitions. (I envy you.) I know you said this was in chunks, but I can see where it all fits. You'll have no problem piecing it together.*

Elaboration (facts and examples). Did the writer give you enough facts? Enough examples? Were the facts and examples well paced, interspersed perhaps with anecdotes?

Kelly: You should have the dates of the Civil War when you mention that in the first paragraph. I think it's in the 1860s—go for "late 1800s" and you can't miss. The other facts are great. You must read a lot of poetry to be able to remember those verbatim.

Language. Was it vivid? Did the writer use images to help you picture the information? List a couple of images that were particularly effective.

Kelly: The first sentence is particularly vivid. I read it and went, "WOW." I also like (in the Claude McKay section) your image of tall white buildings trapping him in New York. Really nicely done. The part about "jazz and blues rhythms that could be heard at any hour . . ." also gets me. I guess what I'm saying is that you know what you're doing as far as language goes.

Beginning and Ending. Were they effective? Did the beginning draw you in? Did the ending refocus what the essay was about and why the writer was writing it? Give the writer any suggestions that might improve the beginning and ending.

Kelly: The beginning sentence definitely drew me in. I have no real clue as to where the end is, so I'm not sure about that. If you could refocus it on your first paragraph, that would be great.

After reading the written responses from her writing group and completing her next draft, Kasik met with her team to discuss what was, with only minor editing changes, her final draft. That draft, the "Exemplary Student Essay," preceded this process section.

First Draft

With his angry poem about racial violence "If We Must Die" author C.M. became the first recognized poet of the H.R.

~~With his angry poem "If We Must Die" Claude McKay is/was recognized as the first poet of the Ren.~~ Although born and raised in Jamaica he spent much of his adult life in Harlem, writing bitter poems about American Cultures and reminisant poems about Africa and his home land Jamaica.

In his poem "The Tropics in New York" he conveys the bright how the Sadd? remind him of home and freedom while the tall white buildings and crowds trap an isolated boy of colour.

Like CH. Langston Hughes, easily the best known P of the HR, wrote poems and stories about racism and its effects on black life. While CH used lush tropical metaphors to describe oppression, Hughes gave his poems the jam and blues rhythms that could be heard at any hour on the streets of Harlem. ##

a champion of N.Gs back to Africa movement many of his poems were reminisant of his homeland.

change format

of both these elements

makes him long for home where he is not

had sounds of the high of tropic rainstorm.

Fig. 4. Michelle Kasik's first draft

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Prewriting Strategies

Research of many kinds, including prewriting activities, calls upon strategies essential to writing reports of information. Typical classroom activities that direct students to collect and organize information may include the following:

- Individual, group, or class discussions to focus thinking
- Clustering and mapping
- Dialectical journals or learning logs to record transactions with texts of any subject
- Student surveys, polls, or interviews
- List-making and categorizing
- Listings of possible audiences and discussions about how reports for various audiences might differ
- Sketching, drawing, or painting to illustrate a process, event, or technique to be included (and described) in a report
- Panel discussions, debates, or impromptu presentations to report findings from research, experience, recent readings, or investigations
- Recounting of a memorable trip with a focus on aspects of particular interest

Response and Revision

In the process of sharing information in a report, writers and responders concentrate on the clarity and completeness of that information. After writing a first draft, students might work individually, in pairs, or in larger groups to engage in a variety of response activities designed to enable them to revise their drafts. Included in this section are some questions that might help initiate student dialogue about a report.

These suggested questions help students to focus on a report of information draft in terms of the characteristics specific to this type of writing—controlling idea, elaborated information, organized pattern of development, and authoritative and consistent stance. As students develop an awareness that they are revising drafts with a specific purpose and audience in mind, they will gain skill in revising their work to make it clear, strong, accurate, and suitable for their intended audience.

Setting up Groups

If your students are used to working in groups, they will be comfortable with the methods suggested here. If they are new to the use of groups in responding to each other's writing, you may need to use the following strategies:

- Keep the groups small to begin with, two or three students.
- Select just two or three questions for the first session.
- Give a reasonable time limit for the discussion.
- Have students recap the group work by writing a brief report (more experience in this type of writing) of the group discussion, pointing out any suggestions and summarizing key points of the discussion.
- Have students work in pairs as they respond to each other's papers.

As students come to understand the characteristics of report of information and experience the benefits of discussion and group work, they will need very little direction from the teacher. Their responses will come naturally as real readers respond to real writing.

Suggested Questions for Group

Discussion (General)

- What did you learn from reading this paper? Summarize this information for the writer and check it against his or her intention.
- Who is the intended audience for this report? How do you know?
- How does the writer engage interest and hold it? If the writer has not engaged your interest, try to tell him or her why.
- Read the paper to distinguish facts from opinions. When you find an opinion, check with the writer to see whether she or he can convert that opinion to a factual statement. If not, the writer may choose to delete the opinion.

The following specific questions relate to the characteristics of report of information:

- What convinces you that the writer is an authority on this subject? (stance)
- State the writer's controlling idea. (controlling idea)
- How does this idea set the framework for the organization? (organization)

- Is the report easy to follow? If so, what made it so? If not, where did you find it difficult to follow? (organization)
- What additional information might add to the reader's more complete understanding of the subject? (elaboration)
- What information, if any, is not relevant to this report or would not be of interest to the intended audience? Can you think of any justification for keeping it in? (elaboration)
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the beginning and ending of the report. Discuss options that might make the report more effective. (organization)

Classroom Writing Assignments

In *Active Voices III: A Writer's Reader* (Boynton/Cook, 1987), James Moffett presents a number of assignments that lead to reports of information under the general heading of "Investigation." These assignments, each with several samples of student writing, fall into the categories of reportage, biography and chronicle, case and profile, factual article, and research article. In *The I-Search Paper* (Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1988), Ken Macrorie details the rich, varied possibilities of personal research in his familiar "I-Search" assignment prototype. Many teachers, recognizing how important it is for students to be able to write effective reports as they enter the research-dominated working world, have designed their own adaptations of these assignments for both individuals and groups of students. Moving away from the formal research paper that relied solely on secondhand research, mainly from undigested encyclopedic articles, they now view research in a more global way, incorporating visits to locales and interviews as critical aspects of research and reporting. Several such assignments are outlined here for your use. They may be used as they are written or adapted easily to specific subject matter explorations.

The Dialectical Journal

While not a typical report, the dialectical journal format enables students to report on their own perceptions as they read and transact with literature or texts from other disciplines.

Figure 5 is an example of two brief entries in Steve Zeman's dialectical journal on Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.*

While many students use the dialectical journal to respond on a very personal level to what they are reading, Zeman keeps his responses keyed directly to the words of the text, excellent preparation for an interpretation paper later. One of the values of the dialectical journal is its flexibility for a wide variety of responses.

Report on a Place

Have students choose a place that they would like to report on for a feature article for the school or local newspaper. You may want to spend some class time discussing what makes a place interesting—whether it is the nature of the locale itself or what has happened there that makes it interesting. Students can make plans in groups, then visit the place they have chosen to observe, taking notes, perhaps including drawings, perhaps visiting the place at different times so that

Quotation	Response
p. 341 ". . . Sometimes you could hear a sweep creaking, or jumbled up voices, it was so still, and sounds come so far."	*Huck's feeling for the river here is like the sense one often has when taking a respite from daily pressures—others seem distant, their voices mere sounds. One feels detached and "adrift"—like when one is alone on a hill over the city at night—the life below seems so distant from oneself, sounds come from unseen sources.*
p. 343 ". . . we lit our pipes—dangled our legs in the water, and talked about all kinds of things; we was always naked, day and night."	*Huck and Jim lead an idyllic life together on the raft. They grow closer each day—more and more they are friends. The raft is their Garden of Eden—a haven and source of life and love.*

Fig. 5. Dialectical journal

they can see it under different conditions. On return, they will write up their notes as a report of information.

Note: This assignment might lead, as well, to observational writing. The distinction lies in the writer's stance or point of view. In a report a student might well make frequent visits, might compare his or her own observations with those of others. The stance will be that of a disinterested reporter rather than of an observer who attempts to convey his or her particular view of a single observation.

Subject Matter Assignments

Report of information strategies are appropriate as groundwork for students as they work to construct meaning from a text. Writing activities may be viewed as strategies that enable students to develop their own understandings of a text. A natural report of information for any work would be preliminary or concurrent research about either the historical period of the novel itself or of the author. Internal reports, however, might follow similar guidelines as those used for keeping a dialectical journal.

Literature

- Trace a character's growth through a novel.
- Follow the author's development of a symbol through a novel.
- Compare the behavior of two characters in the same novel or in different novels that deal with the same theme.
- Record and research allusions that illuminate character or plot.

History–Social Science

Writing assignments that combine drama and history might include the following:

- Before reading the play *The Crucible*, research and report on the background of Salem witchcraft trials.
- After reading *The Crucible*, research and report on the parallels between the Salem trials and McCarthyism of the 1950s.
- Research the history of major productions of *The Crucible* and report on your findings, correlating them with the dominant political conditions of the times.
- Read a different play that has its origins in the political climate of the time and report on the correspondences between the historical and literary scenes (suggested: *Antigone* by both Sophocles and Anouilh).

History–Social Science

Assignments that combine poetry and history might include the following:

- Select a historical period that interests you (or that you are studying in history) and look at the poetry written during that time. Write a report chronicling the incidence of overt historical or political references in the poetry of its time (suggested: the poetry of the First World War or the Vietnam War).
- Follow the directions above, but conduct a more highly focused research project. For example, using works of the major poets of a particular period, record the subjects of their poems. Document the similarities and differences of the subject matter of poems written by men and by women. If different groups select different historical eras, the class will have reports of information providing data for an interpretive study of how men and women poets have used the political climate of their times as a basis for their poetry.

General Assignments Appropriate to Many Different Disciplines

Reports of information are appropriate assignments in courses across the curriculum. Examples follow:

- The *history–social science* teacher might ask students to report on historical figures, explorers, trends, or events.
- The *science* teacher regularly asks for reports at various stages of unit studies or lab experiments. Both observation notes and

formal lab conclusions can be developed into reports of information.

- The *industrial arts* teacher may require students to write reports that explain a process or procedure for building a particular project so other students would better understand the required steps.
- The *art* teacher might have students prepare a visual report of information as an assignment to teach objectivity in perception.
- A *math* instructor might ask students to write a report of their own thinking about the way they solved a particular problem. (This approach is a part of the California mathematics assessment.)
- *English* teachers might also consider reports as groundwork for interpretation, speculation, and reflection.

Interview

There are unlimited possibilities for the interview assignment. Students might interview members of their families or people who have made career choices students are considering. You might ask students to interview people who have lived through some aspect of the historical period being studied in history or English. You might engage the class in a study of community history and have students interview older members of the community who have firsthand knowledge of the origins of place-names, town traditions, and family or school rivalries.

Secondary research might be appropriate as students prepare for their interviews. For example, students in Berkeley, interviewing people about their memories of the Free Speech Movement during the 1960s, might read newspaper accounts of the time, read some of the poetry that emerged during this period, listen to the music that provided a constant rhythm to the entire movement, or visit People's Park as it is today and contrast it to the park of the 1960s.

A student conducting an interview with that background would be able to visualize the subject's own memories and place them into an already rich context. If a point is made to interview people in their own surroundings—office, home, stadium, or whatever seems most appropriate—students can incorporate aspects of place into the interview.

Before having students either conduct or write up interviews, you may want to have them explore different formats by assigning a wide range of published interviews for them to read and discuss. Many teachers also have students conduct classroom interviews—of each other, of other teachers, of the principal—as they try out questions and see how to encourage other people to talk. They very quickly discover which questions are conversation stoppers and which lead to an informative discussion.

Biography: Sketch, Phase, or Life

Reports on lives of people are standard assignments in many classes, especially history–social science and English. Again, like the traditional research paper, the biographical report can be a recounting of what a student has read from a single encyclopedia entry or life summary in some other reference work. Reports on lives of people can, however, provide rich experiences in research and reporting, if students learn how to tap the resources of historical documents, pamphlets, magazine articles, letters, newspaper accounts, memoirs of others who know or knew the subject, diaries and other autobiographical accounts, and perhaps, if available, fictionalized or dramatized accounts of the life of the subject. Often this kind of intensive research can be done by pairs of students, giving each one the opportunity to talk about his or her own research. Sharing of information, perhaps augmented by making a map of the person's life together, can lead to a deep understanding of the subject. Each student would, in this instance, write a final paper.

Biographical research may lead to different kinds of reports, depending on the intended audience. A sketch would be a quick assignment, while a biographical phase or whole-life treatment would be a more comprehensive one.

Class Newspaper

Class newspapers, rich in reportage, provide for the diversity of interest and ability that we find in any typical classroom. A topic or theme relevant to the curriculum provides the focus; students, working individually, in pairs, and in groups, provide the specific ideas and the writing. If the school has a printing department, students can print copies for class members or for a more widespread distribution.

On the following pages is an example of a student newspaper produced by a class that was reading and studying *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald (see Figure 6). Notice how the whole paper reflects knowledge of newspaper

2 CENTS **DAILY WIRLWIND** Vol. XXXIX, No. 27 Dr. Whirry's Junior Honors English Class 1989 Room 16 April 27, 1927

Teapot Dome scandal is concluded

■ Tina Der
Staff Writer

Yesterday afternoon, the Supreme Court concluded the Teapot Dome trials. Two of the three "criminals" were convicted because of the scandal that occured a few years ago involving the naval oil reserves.

The oil reserves were first intended for the navy in case of shortages elsewhere. 70,000 acres of oil land in Elk Hills, California was set aside by former president Taft in 1912, and 10,000 acres in Teapot Dome, Wyoming was set aside in 1915 by Wilson. By the consent of Secretary of Navy Edwin Derby, it was transfered to the Interior Department at the request of the former Secretary of Interior Albert Fall.

Fall said, "The reserves were losing oil through drainage, so I suggested that the government lease them to private companies for a profit." In 1922, Fall leased these reserves to two wealthy oil operaters Teapot Dome to Harry Sinclair and Elk Hills to Edward Doheny. The transactions were secret, but the veteran progressive LaFollette learned of them and asked the Senate to form an investigation.

Excitement broke out after Fall bought a $170,000 ranch in New Mexico. Fall claimed that he received loans from two oil operators". The loans totalled $350,000. Fall's resignation followed after the investigation began. The trials, which started in 1924 found all three guilty of conspiracy to defraud but convicted Fall for accepting a bribe.

He was sentenced to one year in prison and was fined $100,000. Doheny and Sinclair were aquitted. While Doheny got off scot-free, Sinclair was held in contempt of the Senate for refusing to answer questions and was fined $1,000 plus nine months in jail for having his jurors shadowed.

The oil reserves are still sitting but the Senate is considering the plan to invalidate the leases that have been obtained through fraud and corruption.

Five Power Navy Treaty signed, disamament conference ends.

■ Tony Kin
Staff Writer

Washington- The conference on disarmament has been completed and the first real arms reduction treaty is the result.

Last April, President Harding held a joint session of Congress that the U.S. "will have no part" in the League of Nations.

While rejecting the League, the president promised that his own administation would cooperate with foreign governments in constructing a non-political association of nations and in rebuilding war-torn European nations.

The Washington Arms Conference is the first example of the president's message. Instead of cooperating with Europe through the League, President Harding called upon Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan to congregate in Washington to discuss arms reduction. The conference has ended successfully with the signing of the Five Powers Naval Treaty.

This treaty is truely the first real arms reduction agreement. The five powers have come to an agreement to limit the number, size, and guns of their battleships for 15 years. In addition, the naval powers have agreed to ban the use of subs to destroy merchant ships. This treaty, as a result, has prevented the prospect for a powerful naval Japan / Great Britain alliance which has been feared of for some time. More importantly, the treaty has avoided the controversial convenant by which a majority vote of the League could force all members to take action against an aggressor.

This agreement is an example of how the president will continue to conduct foreign affairs without being entangled in the League of Nations. Without being entangled in world affairs, the president has been able to assemble a conference to reduce arms.

The conference was held by Secretary Hughs. It began on November 12, 1921. The conference recessed briefly and resumed at the begining of this year.

Still awaiting ratification by the U.S. Senate is the Four Power Naval Treaty which was put together last winter. That treaty was an agreement along with the U.S., Great Britian, France and Japan to respect each other's possessions in the Pacific under League of Nations guidlines.

When ratified, the agreement will give the U.S. privileges in the Pacific, even though it has refused to become a part of the League of Nation.

The U.S. will have access to Pacific territories held by the three other countries. Also it shall be able to use the important cable and telegraph center on the Yap Islands of Japan.

Seven gang members cut down by machine gun fire.

■ Steve Edwards
News Editor

Seven men were grotesquely cut in half by machine guns yesterday.

The seven men killed were members of the O'Banion gang.

The O'Banion men were at a garage waiting for a load of hijacked liquor to arrive. Three men dressed as police entered the garage and pretended to be carrying out a raid.

As the seven men stood with their hands in the air, two men dressed in civilian clothing proceded to mow them down with their submachine guns.

When the shooting was over the three "policemen" led the two killers out of the building and into the waiting police cars as if they were under arrest.

By the ume the real authorities figured out what had really happened the killers and accomplices had been able to escape.

This case differs from the past gang warfare killings that have occured. It differs in the fact that this gang killing showed imagination and ingenuity.

The event was planned out systematically in advance. One witness stated, "The police officers walked in and out in less than a minute, and that was it."

The massacre was master minded by "Machine Gun" Jack under the orders of mafia leader, Al Capone.

Dion O'Banion, the previous leader of the O'Banion gang, was killed five years ago. It was soon taken over by Bugs Morgan. Al Capone became "fed up" with Morgan's men and the competition that they were supplying. He felt the need to eliminate them because he thought that they were still trying to avenge O'Banion's death.

This mass killing not only served the purpose of getting rid of a threat but it also exhibited Capone's growing power. He is said to be on his to becoming the head of the underworld. He has his own army which presently consists of 700 men.

His growing power is due to his growing control of illegal distribution of alcolol. The 400 gang related deaths are also due to the illegal distribution of alcohol.

All of this, the growth of organized crime, bloody murders, and gang warfare is due to prohibition.

Prohibition was formed to save lives from alcoholism but it isn't saving lives from bullets.

WEATHER

Cool and cloudy weather will continue today and Tuesday with a 60 percent chance of showers. Tempuratures will range from the 60's all the way down to the low 30's at night. Coastal regions should expect fog to last all morning and then for it to burn off around 2 p.m. In the inland valleys the weather will be slightly warmer, but they will be getting some more snow in the next week.

There is a small craft warning out today even in the bay. Northeast winds will increase to 20-25 knots with 4-foot seas decreasing later in the evening. Dense fog will dissipate by this afternoon.

Tommarows forcast is the same with slightly lower tempuratures. Wednesday and Thursday the tempurature will drop again and there is an 80 percent chance of rain. Later this week we should see some snow in and about the city and proper percautions are advised. This should be the last snow of the year, so get ready!

Next week the weather should begin to improve with warmer tempuratures and clear skies. May should be a good month for picnics and will bring on a beautiful June. This summer should be a delight for all.

Two men die over marital spat

■ Eric Barth
Metro Editor

Yesterday, Mr. Jay Gatsby was found dead in the swimming pool at his house in West Egg, Long Island. He was apparently shot and killed by an enraged George Wilson who believed that Gatsby was having an illicit affair with late wife, Mrs. Mytle Wilson.

Mytle Wilson was killed three days ago by a speeding motorist in front of Mr. Wilson's car repair shop. Michaelis, the Wilsons neighbor said that Wilson had been acting quite strange a few days before the accident that killed Mrs. Wilson. Mr. Wilson may have suspected at that time that Mrs. wilson was having an extra-marital affair. Whether or not Mrs. Wilson was having an affair remains unknown.

"Apparently," said Michaelis, "Wilson thought that Myrtle's lover was driving the yellow car that hit her." Mr. Wilson, continued Michaelis, "thought Mrs. Wilson was trying to hail the driver of the car and the driver didn't stop because he saw Mr. Wilson watching from his window."

Mr. wilson, believing Mrs. Wilson's partner had been in the car, somehow found out that the owner was Mr. Jay Gatsby.

Yesterday, both Gatsby and Mr. Wilson were found dead in Gatsby's backyard. Gatsby had two bullet holes in his body, and Mr. Wilson's wounds were at the temple, where he shot himself.

Ceremonies will be held for both men at noon at the town church hall.

Sacco and Vanzetti put to death.

■ Tera Reeve
Staff Writer

Last night, the famous case of Sacco and Vanzetti came to an end. Seven years after their arrest Nicole Sacco and Bartholoneo Vanzetti were sent to the electric chair.

Over seven years ago, at the height of the Red Scare, a paymaster and his guard who was carrying the payroll of a shoe factory, were shot and killed in Braintree, Massachusettes.

Two Italien men, Nicole Sacco and Bartholoneo Vanzetti were picked up in an automobile, which carried anarchist propaganda, and were arrested. A year later they were tried and convicted.

Very little was said about Sacco and Vanzetti in the early stages of the case until the public began to question their guilt.

Bombs were set off in foreign U.S. embassys, and a boycott of U.S. goods occured in Monterido to protest the conviction of Sacco and Vanzetti. Nonetheless, Judge Thayer still found them guilty.

Public opinion forced Governor Fuller to review the case and consider a pardon. Instead, both Thayer and Fuller decided to follow through with the sentence.

Therefore last night, the two men were put to death. Sacco's parting words were, "What we have suffered during these seven years no human tongue can say, and yet you see me before you, not trembling, you see me looking in your eyes straight not blushing, not changing color, not ashamed or in fear."

The execution was a traumatic experience for the people who believed in the innocence of Sacco and Vanzetti. Their trust and faith in the system of justice has been greatly lessened. Understandably so, when Sacco and Vanzetti were presumed guilty from the start.

INSIDE TODAYS EDITION OF THE DAILY WIRLWIND

Page 2 and 3 Metro	Gatsby Dies	Pages 6, 7, and8 Life and Arts	Fashion
	Editorials - Page 4 and 5		Entertainment
Obituaries	Life and Arts	Books	To submit ADs, come to the newspapers Business office located on the third floor on the Times building on Third Street or call 987-6543.
Dear Anne	Lefty's Column	Art	
Modle T	White Sox	Crossword Puzzle	
Real estate	Baker Scandle	Dance	
Prohibition		Music	

Fig. 6. A student newspaper

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2 Daily Whirlwind April 2, 1927 **Metro**

Obituaries

COGHLAN. William Henry ... passed away yesterday afternoon at the age of 75. He was the head of Fine Arts at Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences ... Funeral Sunday, 10:00. Memorial ... to be held at 7PM Monday, April 24 at Trinity Episcopal Church in lieu of flowers, those who wish may donate to the ... of their choice.

FUCCINI, Eugenio ... famous music composer passed away last night. His most sought-after composition was ... Madame Butterfly. ... Interment in Mount Sinai Memorial Park.

FRASER, Lionel ... former Tattler's advisor of Sunday Pictorial and Daily Mirror, most widely known for being fired of the Editorial staff of the Times ... He passed away sadly yesterday morning. There will be no services. Memorial donations may be made to the Cancer Society.

BROOKE, Emma Frances ... passed away last evening. She was a descendant of ... and well ... Lambs. She was a devoted ... who enjoyed hearing ... loved people talk and sitting by the ...

WHITEHEAD, Rt. Rev. Cortland ... Bishop of Pittsburgh since 1885, passed away later last evening. Services will be held at Episcopal Church in Pennsylvania. Friends may call at the residence from 2p.m. to 5p.m. on April 21.

BROADHURST, Mary Adelaide ... passed away yesterday at noon. She was the president of the National Political League and most notably the originator of the Women's Land Army. Memorial services will be held at 3p.m. Wednesday, April 19, at Sixth Hours and Bedford Temple.

LOCNTS, John Frederick ... Member of the Board of Revenue passed away last night. He enjoyed any available game and published a pamphlet on entomology. No services will be held for the public.

VERRETT, Lucia Hester Bacon ... expired yesterday. He was the Assistant Deputy Postmaster General since 1911. Services will be at noon Sunday at Hillside Memorial Park Chapel.

DICKSON, Henry Seaton ... Assistant Editor of Encyclopedia Britannica and Professor of Geography at University College, passed away yesterday. Services are to be announced.

Letters to Dear Anne

Model T, hot off the assembly line

■ ... Staff Writer

... $440 dollars. Ford stated, "A car for the multitudes that is a high quality, inexpensive auto is what I wanted to achieve. I think I have done so."

Indeed he has. With 50% of all the cars in the world being Ford models, there is no serious competition in sight. A clear indication that Henry Ford must be doing something right.

With people now traveling further than ever can they credit ... because of the most automobile ... and should of a new ... Americans are their lives.

Perhaps Henry Ford's greatest ... is not in the automobile ... but in the assembly line. The assembly line means an ... of automobiles ... and ... developing ...

Without question all these new ... inventions and discoveries will ... lead to the expansion and ... construction of new and stronger ... industries in these prosperous ...

Up and coming architects.

■ Jennifer Barrow
Staff Writer

Many consider Frank Lloyd Right to be one of the most prominent architects of the decade and there are some who feel his work to be outlandish and in poor taste. Whatever the case may be ... few would dispute the ... that he is the greatest ... of residential architecture.

His newest project which has created much talk in the architectural circle, is the creation of the Kaufmann house. Sited beside a large waterfall, it is being designed to take best advantage of the surrounding landscape. Wright uses a nearby quarry at liberty as he constructs nearly all of the house out of stone. Varying a little from natural materials, he creates three terraces of reinforced concrete. The terraces nicely emphasize the waterfall and make it seem a natural extension of the house.

It is work like this which is now molding the newest forms of architecture. Architects are taking advantage of their natural surroundings. An example is the newest remodeling of the Biltmore House. Originally the house was perched upon a hill looking out of place and quite blunt. But the Biltmore, greatly influenced by Wright, created a masterpiece of stone. The hill was actually cut into, so the house seems to grow up from where it sits rather than being set down upon it.

Another prominent but less celebrated architect of today is young R. Buckminster Fuller. His creation of the Ds Maxion House has made him the most innovative of architects. This experimental dwelling has glass walls, rooms hung from a central mast, and some energy efficient devices.

RISING HOME PRICES

■ Tony Sunset
Staff Writer

After a slight recession (1921-22) the economy has staged a dramatic recovery. The reason for this economic upturn is mainly the development of Europe after The Great War. The nation's manufacturing output has risen by ... the gross national product has increased 5% a year and per ... income has grown by a ... third.

The result of this economic boom is a stimulation of the real ... market. Priced of homes are ... the rise and the currently there ... a sellers market. At the ... real estate appears to be ... investment for ... money. Immediate action in the field could cause enormous gains for the prudent real estate investor. Trends seem to point to a continuation of this upwards movement for up to 2 years, then a leveling off in the market.

Of course, this can be a very profitable field, but there are several things the first time buyer should beware. First, make sure the investment is within your means. Do not stretch your assets until you are more experienced. Second, make a sound investment, look over the area of the house you are buying, so that chances are you will get an substantial gain on your real estate investment.

Fig. 6. A student newspaper (continued)

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format and the historical time period as well as the characteristics of reportage.

Other Possibilities

Opportunities for reports of information may include other possibilities—chronicles, case studies, "how to" articles, and, the most obvious, a straightforward factual account of an event, a discovery, or a historical era. These reports need to be carefully focused toward a particular audience. Sometimes, writing the same report for different audiences—one for younger children, perhaps—can help students understand the topic in a fresh, new way.

Additional Exemplary Student Essay

This exemplary report is one that Mark Kyle wrote during a timed writing assignment. He did have time to do some prewriting and thinking about his topic before writing, however.

Me: The Well-Balanced Meal

From my own personal experiences, I know that it's true: YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT! When I work out, I can tell which foods affect my body in different ways. I can tell which foods are good for me and which foods are not; i.e., salads = good; McDonald's = bad! It's hard to eat everything that is good for you all the time and I do slip into McD's for a burger every once in a while, but I try to avoid it. Most of the time I eat well, so I think of myself as a well-balanced meal.

Usually for breakfast I will have a bowl of Health Valley Oh's, which is not one of those sugar cereals with the toy surprises in it. Along with this I will also have a glass of orange juice and, of course, my vitamins. It makes me feel better to have a nutritious breakfast than it does to have a sugar-filled breakfast because I know that I am putting healthy food into my body and that helps me to get through the day.

For lunch I try to eat a good salad or a couple of sandwiches along with some fruit. I solve the problem of going to the fast food joints by bringing my lunch, and bringing only healthy food! But on the days that I don't bring my lunch I have to resist temptation and get a salad at Sub-King. Just last week I gave into temptation and went to Tommy's. And boy was that a bad idea. I guess if you eat it often you built up a tolerance for the stuff, but me, who never eats Tommy's, has no tolerance for it at all. I felt sick for that day and the next day, all because I am what I eat, and for that day, I was a double-chili-burger.

Lunch is the most important meal for me because it fuels me through my workouts. I guess that you can compare what you eat to the kind of gas you put into your car: Tommy's vs. Salads = Unleaded vs. Super-Unleaded.

For dinner I always eat a well-balanced meal, either cooked by my mom, or rarely, by me. My dinner usually consists of chicken, vegetables, a salad, and some grains such as rice or bread. When I eat like this I know that I am doing what's right for me. Although sometimes I do get sick of this and go out for dinner. I don't think it's too bad if you go out every once in a while, is it?

My lifestyle of working out and playing football has helped me in many ways. I am glad that it has taught me to eat nutritiously. And maybe if I eat well-balanced meals until I am 96 years old, I will die a well-balanced meal. After all, you are what you eat!

Reports of information are clearly directed to particular audiences. In school, the audience is usually composed of members of the class and the teacher. School newspapers, however, provide real opportunities for widespread dissemination of reports. The published newspaper reports that appear later in this guide are exemplary in that they fulfill all of the features of effective reports of information, such as (1) a clearly articulated controlling idea; (2) elaborated support of the controlling idea; (3) an organized pattern of development; and (4) an articulate voice giving evidence of an authoritative and consistent stance.

Guidelines for Writing Prompts for Report of Information

Report of information requires students to present information for the purpose of adding to what readers already know about a subject. In this situation, writers are concerned primarily with informing readers rather than challenging their beliefs, persuading them to take action, or enticing them with autobiographical disclosures. Report of information subjects can come from writers' special interests, knowledge of school or community, or newly acquired academic learning.

Writers must orient readers to the subject and keep them on track with a coherent report. The best reports convey writers' engagement with their subjects and commitment to sharing them with readers. It is not appropriate to present an argument or an evaluation; instead, writers focus on providing information. Unlike observational writing, which centers on a one-time experience,

report of information draws on the writer's familiarity with a subject.

Following are guidelines for drafting the writing situation and directions for writing for report of information prompts. Prompts that model these guidelines are included.

Writing Situation

Identify a subject for the report, and describe it for the student in one to four sentences. The subject will nearly always be general, leaving to the student the choice of a specific subject and what information to include. For example, students might be asked to describe one of their classes for high school students in Australia, but without suggesting to students which class to choose or what to include in the report.

Ensure that students readily recognize the subject and have an adequate context for reporting on it. Be sure to use the word *report*. If students are to report on a process (how to do something, like wax snow skis) or activity (windsurfing), help them understand that their purpose is not to give directions, but rather to increase readers' understanding of the subject and their interest in it.

In a separate brief paragraph of two or three sentences, identify who is asking the student to write the report (perhaps the student's teacher) or the source where it will be published (perhaps the school newspaper) or who will read it (perhaps other students).

Directions for Writing

Begin the directions, "Write a report about . . ." or "Write an essay (or letter) reporting about . . ." Mention again the reader or readers. Use the words *inform, informative, or information*, and possibly *describe, present*, or *explain*. The words *specific, detailed*, or *interesting* may be appropriate.

Do not lead students by suggesting aspects of a subject to include in their reports. Conclude the directions with a sentence that reiterates what readers will be expecting from the report.

Keep sentences relatively brief and vocabulary accessible. Title the prompt in a way that keeps students focused on the writing situation.

Note: These guidelines should not constrain classroom writing assignments or student writing projects. Good classroom assignments and projects may share certain features of state testing prompts—purposefulness, specific readers, suggestions about strategies—but classroom assignments need not observe the constraints on test prompts. These guidelines are designed solely to enable consultants to write prompts for the state writing assessment.

Reporting About a Current Problem or Controversy

Writing Situation. We are surrounded by problems and controversies every day, at home, at school, at work, and in our communities. While we often hear or read about people taking sides on a particular issue or controversy, or making suggestions about how to solve it, it is often difficult to learn about the problem or controversy—how it came about, who is involved in it, what positions they hold, and so forth.

Your social science teacher has asked you to write an essay reporting about a current problem or controversy. Think about the problems or controversies you are familiar with, and choose one to write about.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay for your social science teacher reporting on a current problem or controversy. Do not take a position on the subject or try to solve it; instead, focus on trying to describe it clearly. Include specific examples so that your teacher will get a clear picture of the problem or controversy. Try to make your report both informative and interesting for the teacher.

Reporting About How to Read a Play

Writing Situation. Reading a play calls for a set of skills somewhat different from the skills required in reading a novel or a biography. In addition to the dialogue by characters, a play usually has a description of the stage set, lighting instructions and instructions on how a character looks, responds, or moves. Often readers need to interpret these directions in order to understand the story as it unfolds.

Your English class is writing a handbook of study skills for first-year high school students. Your job is to write the section reporting about how to read a play. Think about how a reader comes to understand and enjoy a play.

Directions for Writing. Write a report for first-year high school students about how to read

a play. You want to help the younger students succeed with this special type of reading. Include specific advice and examples so that the students will get a clear idea of how to read a play. Try to make your report both informative and interesting for younger students.

Essays Written for the Field Test

The following reports illustrate the range of papers written during a large-scale field test.

High-range Achievement

The following report responds to a prompt on a minor character in a literary work. After a "schoolish" beginning, the writer's own voice emerges at the end of the first paragraph in his controlling idea—the effect that Uriah Heep has on him. This idea shapes the essay, determining the information included.

The writer uses several strategies for elaborating information, choosing primarily to list and embellish Heep's most grotesque qualities of appearance, presence, and personality. The writer's stance is consistent and the report organized logically. While not a six-point paper, this report does reflect a high level of achievement for a timed writing assessment.

Uriah Heep

Some of the most memorable characters in literature are found in novels by Charles Dickens, particularly David Copperfield. *Even his minor characters have so much personality that their image endures long after the book is closed. Characters like the pure and truthful Agnes, the ever-genteel Mr. Macawber, and, of course, the "'umble" Uriah Heep, always stand out in my mind. Uriah Heep: whenever the name is mentioned I cringe in disgust!*

When I first think of Uriah Heep, I remember his grotesque appearance and ever-obsequious presence throughout the novel. Uriah's tall, slightly bent frame and constant writhing automatically caused me to loathe him. Somehow, whenever a matter of any importance was being discussed, Uriah Heep could always be found close by, eavesdropping. When David and Agnes talked of Mr. Wickfield's drinking habit, Uriah lurked nearby, waiting to snatch any piece of information that he might be able to use.

Heep's personality is perhaps even more vulgar than his physical appearance. Uriah is constantly fawning over and kissing up to the people around him. He is only trying to ameliorate his own lowly station in life. Uriah fawned his way from a clerk to a partner in Mr. Wickfield's practice, while still remaining "'umble." He always seemed to writhe his way into affairs in which he didn't belong. Uriah watched eagerly as Mr. Wickfield drank himself away to the point where he could take over. He then used the power he had gained to pin fraud on poor Mr. Wickfield. Heep blamed the financial downfall of Betsy Trotwood on Wickfield, and kept her money for himself.

Although a minor character, the name "Uriah Heep" will always have the power to spread a cringe of distaste over my features. Thus it is the qualities that an author bestows upon his characters, no matter how insignificant, that forever live vividly in the reader's mind. It is both Uriah's villainous personality and hideous physical appearance that will always hold a place in my memory.

Mid-range Achievement

The next report, on the subject of survival skills needed for modern life, represents a paper of medium-range achievement, an adequate paper for a timed writing assessment. After a rather lengthy introduction, the writer elaborates on one of her personal survival skills—reading. She then briefly mentions one other way of coping with modern life before concluding with a generalization. While the organizational pattern of the paper is clear, it lacks the specificity of detail that marks the high-scoring paper.

Surviving

Thousands of years ago when man first evolved, survival skills were simplistic. They were basic needs such as clothing, warmth, shelter, and food. These were needed to get from day to day in that frightening new world.

Today, thousands of years later, we live in a fast-paced lifestyle. Survival skills are no longer simplistic and universal, but complicated and individual. Everyone has something which helps them get through with what can be a grueling day. Whether it be walks at night, watching television or sewing, people everyday take some time out to do what they enjoy even if it is only for five minutes.

One of my personal survival skills is reading. I enjoy reading before bed whether it's five minutes or fifty minutes. It helps me to unwind, relax, and take in my day full of activities. I do not always get a chance to have this relaxing period because of homework, my job or the fact that I have to wake up at five-thirty the next morning for school. Nevertheless, granted that little bit of time, I will take it. For that period of reading can help me forget about my stressful day and help me get lost in a more "perfect world" which can make life seem a little better and less stressful the next day.

Another one of my survival skills is listening to the radio or music in general. I prefer listening to the radio at night especially if I have no time for reading. I listen to the radio as I fall asleep for it helps me relax and feel relieved after a tough day.

As it is apparent my survival skills take place mainly at night when I need them most. They help me relax and fall asleep, just to wake up the next day to find I need my survival skills all over again.

Low-range Achievement

The next paper responds to a prompt that asks students to report on high school friends, using specific examples to illustrate. The writer does deal with the general topic of friendship but fails to elaborate with any specific references to friends who illustrate the general types described. There is an attempt at organization by types of friends, but that breaks down and the paper just stops without any sense of conclusion. Although not a report as it stands, this paper does provide the skeleton for a report; with time and instruction, the writer could make it into a creditable report.

Friends

Friends are people who you think you can trust and care for and are there for you at anytime. Some one you can tell all your problems to and you know they won't tell any but just listen to what you say. Their are different types of friends their are the ones you hang around w/ at school and their are the ones you can tell everything to an not be afraid they will tell some one. some friends are better than others because you see them more often and you know that they just don't come over just because their isn't anything to do. It is good to have one good friend of both sex because you can't tell one sex something but you can tell the other what it has. Most best friends grow up together and have a lot in common they like the same type of music, clothes, cars and other things.

Sometimes some guys have more friends of the opposite sex because they can relate to them a lot better and it goes the same w/ girls they intended to have more friends of the opposite sex if they are well off w/ looks or personality.

Published Examples of Reports of Information

Since reports of information come in various guises and may be found in many different formats, it seems suitable to include several different formats for this type of writing. The section that follows includes:

1. Report about teaching chimpanzees to talk
2. Poem
3. Graphic report outlining a chapter in a book
4. Brief newspaper account of a murder
5. Review of Sylvia Plath's book *Ariel*
6. Scientific report on gravity

Despite the differences in format, ranging from textbook to newspaper to book review, all of these reports give evidence of the primary characteristics of report of information:

- A clearly articulated *controlling idea*
- *Elaborated support* of the controlling idea
- *Organized pattern of development*
- Evidence of an *authoritative and consistent stance*

The first selection, an account of teaching chimpanzees to talk, is taken from Colin Blakemore's *Mechanics of the Mind*, a rich source of anecdotes that have led brain researchers to the state of current knowledge. This report, an introduction to a much longer treatise on the nature of language itself, opens with a brief conversation between a reporter and a "little girl named Lucy."

A Burning Fire[1]

by Colin Blakemore

A few years ago, in the small town of Norman, Oklahoma, a reporter from the New York Times had a brief conversation with a little girl called Lucy.

He held up a key and asked, "What's this?"

"Key," Lucy replied.

Then he picked up a comb. "What's this?"

"Comb," answered Lucy, as she took it from his hands and proceeded to comb his hair. She stopped.

"Comb me," she pleaded.

"O.K.," he said, and combed her.

"Lucy, you want to go outside?" he suggested.

She thought for a while and replied, "Outside, no. Want food; apple."

"I have no food," he apologized, "Sorry."

A singularly unremarkable dialogue, one might think; indeed, the girl seemed rather backward in her grammar. But there again she had been separated from her mother just four days after she was born in 1966, and was brought up by foster parents. And the

[1]Colin Blakemore. "A Burning Fire," in *Mechanics of the Mind*. Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp. 123–126.

conversation was not spoken; it was conducted with a series of hand movements, in American Sign Language for the deaf. Lucy is not deaf, however; she is a chimpanzee. And her foster parents were human. She is a member of a small and elite group of apes who are, unknowingly, excavating the foundations on which man has built the myth of his biological uniqueness.

The attempt to teach language to apes has a history of at least fifty years, but early efforts foundered because they sought to persuade chimpanzees to do something that they simply cannot do—to speak. Most of these animals were reared alongside the experimenters' own babies, and they proved more than a match for their human infant companions, in both agility and intellect, until the baby "naked apes" began to speak. Then, apparently repeating the evolutionary history of man, the human infants soon outstripped their simian colleagues. The failure of chimpanzees to talk seemed to betray a fundamental barrier in their ability to think and to bestow a special status on the intelligence of man.

According to René Descartes, what man has, besides an animal's clockwork brain, is a rational soul. And a distinguishing feature of that rational soul is the capacity for propositional speech, the synthesis of words into statements that, by their form, give extra meaning to those words. Descartes' supreme role for language is echoed in the opinion of successive philosophers and biologists who searched for special characteristics that might explain man's phenomenal cultural progress.

The more that ethologists have learned about the apes, however, the shorter has become the list of supposedly unique human attributes. The use of tools and the solution of problems by insight can no longer be considered as defining features of man. Virtually the only things that can be defended as uniquely human traits are his continuous sexual appetite, his formal taboo on incest, and his language. "All of man's unique social behavior," writes the biologist Edward Wilson, "pivots on his use of language, which is itself unique." Algernon Swinburne called human speech "a burning fire," and there can be no doubt that the use of language was just as important in human evolution as the discovery of flame itself. But now the experiments with American Sign Language threaten to force man to share this ultimate cultural crown with the apes.

Two American psychologists, Allen and Beatrice Gardner, started the project, in Nevada, in 1966. The first scholar in their academy for apes was a one-year-old chimpanzee called Washoe, whom they kept in a luxurious trailer home, surrounded by obsequious attendants who constantly talked to her and to each other in hand language. By the age of five, Washoe has learned the gestural signs for nearly 200 words, including adjectives and verbs as well as nouns. This in itself was not surprising, for learning to make a certain movement of the arms in order to receive a desired object is, in principle, no more of an achievement than learning to beg or jump through a hoop for a piece of food. Words alone do not make propositional speech. Were the words made into the flesh of a genuine language? Did Washoe manipulate her manual lexicon within the framework of a true grammar? That question is still being fiercely contested amongst professional linguists, but I think that the evidence is overwhelming that Washoe has acquired a language—primitive, but not fundamentally different from our own.

The controlling idea in "A Burning Fire" emerges at the end of the initial dialogue, when Lucy is revealed as a chimpanzee rather than a human "little girl." After that engaging beginning, Blakemore moves directly into the more common report mode, chronicling the attempts to teach language to apes over the last 50 years. He provides elaborated support by citing the work of a philosopher, a poet, a biologist, and two psychologists. The organization is largely chronological, moving at the end to another beginning with reference to the first chimpanzee to learn sign language, Washoe. The report, which has its own structural integrity, serves as an introduction to the issues it raises, the nature of language.

The next selection—a poem—may seem at first to be misplaced, but it serves to show that genre and discourse type do not describe writing in the same way. In this case a poem gives evidence of the characteristics of a report of information.

The Unknown Citizen[2]

by W. H. Auden

This Marble Monument Is Erected by the State

He was found by the Bureau of Statistics to be
One against whom there was no official complaint,
And all the reports on his conduct agree
That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
For in everything he did he served the Greater Community.
Except for the War till the day he retired
He worked in a factory and never got fired,
But satisfied his employers, Fudge Motors Inc.
Yet he wasn't a scab or odd in his views,
For his Union reports that he paid his dues.
(Our report on his Union shows it was sound)
And our Social Psychology workers found
That he was popular with his mates and liked a drink.

[2]W.H. Auden, "The Unknown Citizen," in *W.H. Auden: Collected Poems*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1968.

The Press are convinced that he bought a paper every day
And that his reactions to advertisements were normal in every way
Policies taken out in his name prove that he was fully insured,
And his Health-card shows he was once in hospital but left it cured.
Both Producers Research and High Grade Living declare
He was fully sensible to the advantages of the Installment Plan
And had everything necessary to the Modern Man,
A gramophone, a radio, a car and a frigidaire
Our researchers in Public Opinion are content that he held the proper opinions for the time of year;
When there was peace, he was for peace; when there was war, he went.
He was married and added five children to the population,
Which our Eugenist says was the right number for a parent of his generation,
And our teachers report that he never interfered with their education.
Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.

Although this poem is actually a satiric comment on the demise of individuality, it masquerades as a kind of report that we are quite used to, an obituary. Only in the last two lines does it deviate from a straightforward recitation of facts about "the unknown citizen." The first five lines comprise the controlling idea, with the rest of the poem elaborating on this unknown citizen's conformity to the mores of the community. The organization loosely follows that of a traditional obituary. The authoritative and consistent stance is evident throughout. There is no equivocation about the status of this citizen.

After studying this poem, students might well embark on several kinds of projects involving reports: they might scour the local newspaper for obituaries that are reports about a person's life but that present a point of view simply by the selection of facts; they might read some of Edgar Lee Masters's epitaphs in *Spoon River Anthology*, separating the reporting elements from the judgments; they might write their own hypothetical epitaphs or obituaries, again with an awareness of when they are reporting and when they are evaluating.

The next report, although very brief, conveys its information succinctly, without embellishment. The power of the piece comes from its very starkness—the details minimally presented—and from what did *not* happen.

37 Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police [3]

by Martin Gansberg

For more than half an hour 38 respectable, law-abiding citizens in Queens watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks in Kew Gardens. Twice the sound of their voices and the sudden glow of their bedroom lights interrupted him and frightened him off. Each time he returned again. Not one person telephoned the police during the assault; one witness called after the woman was dead.

The factual data in this newspaper report contain enough detail to enable readers to infer a vivid description. Another newspaper might have chosen to report the more elaborated version.

The next illustration looks at first glance to be a traditional book review of a book of poems by Sylvia Plath but turns into a review of Sylvia Plath's life, drawing heavily on poems from the book to illustrate the thoughts and emotions that chronicled her despair. Used in conjunction with some of her poems—notably "Daddy"—the review can provide students with evidence of one option to the bland summary that passes all too often for a book report. This selection is a report of information, but it is not bland nor is it a summary.

The Blood Jet Is Poetry[4]

On a dank day in February, 1961, a pretty young mother of two children was found in a London flat with her head in the oven and the gas jets wide open. The dead woman was Sylvia Plath, 30, an American poet whose marriage to Ted Hughes, a British poet, had gone on the rocks not long before. Her published verses, appearing occasionally in American magazines and gathered in a single volume, *The Colossus*, had displayed accents of refinement, but had not yet achieved authority of tone.

But within a week of her death, intellectual London was hunched over copies of a strange and terrible poem she had written during her last sick slide toward suicide. *Daddy* was its title; its subject was

[3]Martin Gansberg, "37Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police," *New York Times*, March 27, 1967. Copyright 1967 by the New York Times Company. Reprinted by permission.
[4]"The Blood Jet Is Poetry," *Time* (June 10, 1966). Copyright 1966 by Time Warner, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

her morbid love-hatred of her father; its style was as brutal as a truncheon. What is more, *Daddy* was merely the first jet of flame from a literary dragon who in the last months of her life breathed a burning river of bale across the literary landscape.

Published last year in Britain, the last poems of Sylvia Plath sold 15,000 copies in ten months, almost as many as a best-selling novel, and inspired a vigorous new group of confessional poets. Published last week in the U.S., *Ariel* adds a powerful voice to the rising chorus of American bards (Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton, Frederick Seidel) who practice poetry as abreaction.

Worms Like Sticky Pearls. Outwardly, Sylvia's psychosis has standard Freudian trimmings. Her father, born in the Polish town of Grabow in East Prussia, became a professor of entomology at Boston University and is presented in her poetry as an intellectual tyrant with "a love of the rack and the screw." The mother of the heroine in *The Bell Jar*, an autobiographical novel published in England just before Sylvia's death, is described as a metallic New England schoolmarm. Little Sylvia tried to be Daddy's darling. At three she knew the Latin names of hundreds of insects—whenever a bumblebee bumbled by, the pretty little poppet would squeak: *"Bombus bimaculatus!"*

But when she was ten, Daddy died. It was the trauma of her life, or so she came to think in later years. At any rate, she became a compulsive talker, a compulsive learner, a compulsive writer. All through her teens she scribbled stories, plays, poems, many of them sufficiently professional to be published in *Seventeen* and *Mademoiselle*. She won a scholarship to Smith, where she made straight A's. But her feelings took their revenge. At 19, after an unhappy month in New York City, she ran home to Wellesley, Mass., crawled under the front porch, hid behind a stack of kindling and swallowed 50 sleeping pills. Three days later she was found alive but in ghastly condition. "They had to call and call," she wrote later, "and pick the worms off me like sticky pearls."

Words Like Missiles. A series of shock treatments put her back on her feet, but she needed "to be bolstered by someone," and a few years later she found that someone in Poet Hughes, whom she met during her Fulbright year at Cambridge. As a poet, Sylvia matured rapidly during her marriage; after the birth of her daughter Frieda, she found in the woman's world the subject she could call her own.

Love set you going like a fat gold watch.
The midwife slapped your footsoles, and your
bold cry
Took its place among the elements

All night your moth-breath
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to
listen;
A far sea moves in my ear.
One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow
heavy and floral
In my Victorian nightgown.
Your mouth opens clean as a cat's.

But life was more difficult than poetry. In the fall of 1962, just after the birth of her son Nicholas, she and Hughes separated permanently. Alone with the children in Devon, Sylvia hurled herself into a heroic but foolhardy attempt to probe her deepest problems with the point of a pen.

All day she kept house and cared for the children. Most of the night she wrote "like a woman on fire"—two, three, six complete poems night after night. Her fire was black and its name was hatred. Her words were hard and small like missiles, and they were flung with flat force.

Now I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs.
A wind of such violence
Will tolerate no bystanding: I must shriek.

But beneath the hatred she found fear.

I am terrified by this dark thing
That sleeps in me;
All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its
malignity . . .
What is this, this face
So murderous in its strangle of branches?

And beneath the fear, she found a sinister love of death. She longed to feel

the knife not carve, but enter
Pure and clean as the cry of a baby.
And the universe slide from my side.

Death Like a Poem. In her most ferocious poems, *Daddy* and *Lady Lazarus*, fear, hate, love, death, and the poet's own identity became fused at black heat with the figure of her father, and through him, with the guilt of the German exterminators and the suffering of their Jewish victims. They are poems, as Robert Lowell says in his preface to *Ariel*, that "play Russian roulette with six cartridges in the cylinder."

For six months, first in Devon and later in London, Sylvia wrote without letup. By the end of January 1963, her nerves were a shirt of nettles. On February 4 she arrived at a friend's house, lugging the children. "She was in an inferno," the friend remembers. "Depression is not the word." For six days she let herself be looked after, but on February 10 she went back to her flat to spend the night. The next morning, in an Auschwitz all her own, she executed what one critic calls her "last unwritten poem."

The epithet is appropriate. In the last week of her life she laid bare the heart of her art in a clouting couplet:

The blood jet is poetry;
There is no stopping it.

Readings in Report of Information

Reports of information may be found in newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, textbooks, collections of essays, biographies, histories, scientific journals, and books—the resources are endless. Often reporting strategies are combined with strategies characteristic of other types of writing, such as observational writing, evaluation, and interpretation. Once students have internalized the primary features of the report, they will be able to use their understanding of this type of writing to produce effective reports of their own as well as to evaluate reports that they find in their reading and study.

The California Department of Education publication *Recommended Literature: Grades Nine Through Twelve* is an excellent resource for titles of specific works suitable for both study and recreational reading of reports of information. These may be found primarily in the sections "Core and Extended Materials" (biographies, nonfiction, essays, and speeches) and "Recreational and Motivational Materials" (biographies and nonfiction). This document, published in 1989, may be ordered from the Bureau of Publications, Sales Unit, California Department of Education, P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95812-0271.

High School Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide

Report of Information

An effective report of information conveys information accurately and convincingly, serving several closely related purposes: to increase readers' knowledge of a subject, to help readers better understand a procedure or process, or to provide readers with an enhanced comprehension of a concept or idea. Writers of reports of information collect, synthesize, and organize the results of their investigation and present their findings as objectively as possible. Their research may include material from both firsthand and secondhand sources.

Teaching students to synthesize information from a variety of sources deserves high priority in subjects across the curriculum. Students who can use the resources of magazines, books, and computer data banks, as well as those of the community and other people, to communicate the results of their research will have greater success when they move to the more complex tasks of interpretation or speculation. They will be much better able to evaluate the reporting of others, as well. Learning how to employ the strategies of effective research and reporting is certainly one of the key goals of education.

While the *rhetorical* aspect of the assessment focuses on the distinctive features of writing types, the *effectiveness* aspect guides us to look carefully at the more comprehensive features of coherence and style. Coherence, a sense of organization, flow, and focus, is essential to all good writing. The coherent essay has a clear direction, each section flowing naturally from the preceding one. Coherence is demonstrated to readers through recurrences of language, syntax, and ideas. Style, for the purposes of this assessment, is observable in two written language features: (1) *sentence control* and (2) *word choice* or *diction*. In assessment of the effectiveness of style, the primary considerations are *appropriateness*, *precision*, and *control*.

The main purpose in writing a report of information is to present information clearly and succinctly to an identified audience. Report writers convey information directly; they do not attempt to persuade readers, to validate opinions, or to argue in favor of a specific viewpoint. The primary characteristics of an effective report of information provide the framework for the scoring guide.

Score Point 6 – Exceptional Achievement

Controlling Idea. The six-point report has an explicit or implicit controlling idea that determines the writer's choice of points for elaboration. The controlling idea provides coherence, clarity, and focus to the report.

Elaboration and Support. The most successful reports of information rely on a variety of strategies of elaboration, providing carefully selected examples, facts, and details. Strategies used by writers of six-point papers include several of the following, with at least some points fully developed and all elaborated as appropriate for the writer's purpose:

- Name, describe, or differentiate parts.
- Demonstrate claims or assertions.
- Compare or contrast with other subjects.
- Examine the history of a subject.
- Cite an anecdote relevant to the narrating, the process of making, the use of, or the participation in a subject.
- Explain the benefits or limitations of a subject.
- Provide a scenario to illustrate a point.
- Indicate facts about or qualities of a subject.

Elaboration and Support. Language is precise and appropriate. The writer exhibits an exceptional control of a variety of sentence structures.

Organizational Pattern. Writers of six-point reports create an organizational pattern by focusing on components of the subject, developing one or more elements with specific information.

The organizational pattern—chronological, historical, specific to general, general to specific, causal, sequential—depends on the content, the writer's purpose, and the intended audience.

Each section of the essay is developed fully, and the essay as a whole is coherent.

Stance. The writer of a six-point paper conveys a sense of authority about the subject. Considering the intended audience, the writer chooses a pattern of organization and elements for elaboration appropriate to that audience. This stance, or attitude toward the subject and audience, remains stable throughout the report. Through consistency and authority, the writer conveys a sense of commitment to the sharing of information.

Score Point 5 – Commendable Achievement

Controlling Idea. A five-point report has an explicit controlling idea that determines the writer's choice of points for elaboration. The controlling idea provides coherence and focus to the report. The five-point paper may lack the special clarity of the six-point report.

Elaboration and Support. Like the six-point paper, the five-point report relies on a variety of strategies of elaboration, providing carefully selected examples, facts, and details; however, a five-point report lacks the depth and richness of detail found in a six-point report. A five-point report shows the writer's ability to use words precisely and appropriately and to use a variety of sentence structures. Word choice may show less versatility than in the six-point essay; however, the diction is still consistently strong and controlled throughout the essay. Strategies used by writers of five-point essays include several of those used in six-point essays.

Organizational Pattern. A five-point report is well-organized. It begins and ends effectively, but it may not be so clearly patterned, and the transitions or organizational strategies may not display the control of the six-point report.

Stance. The writer of a five-point paper conveys a sense of authority about the subject. The stance, or attitude toward the subject and audience, remains consistent.

Score Point 4 – Adequate Achievement

Controlling Idea. A four-point report has an explicit controlling idea that provides coherence and general focus to the report.

Elaboration and Support. Writers of four-point reports often provide a considerable amount of general information, some of which may seem extraneous and is not supported by concrete and specific examples. The four-point report uses some of the elaboration strategies listed.

Organizational Pattern. A four-point report reveals some organization. The information is arranged in a logical order but does not exhibit the conscious skill of effective movement of elements. The four-point paper may shift in coherence and focus, but it has a clear beginning; the ending, which often seems hurried, at least brings the report to some sense of conclusion. Although the language in the four-point report is generally appropriate, it may be somewhat conventional and predictable.

The report shows a sustained control of sentence structure, but it may have less variety than does the five- or six-point essay.

Stance. The writer of a four-point paper usually conveys less of a sense of authority about the subject. The stance, or attitude toward the subject and audience, may seem shaky or inconsistent.

Score Point 3 – Some Evidence of Achievement

Controlling Idea. A three-point report may have a simple statement of subject; it sometimes has a controlling idea.

Elaboration and Support. The three-point report, like the four-point paper, often provides a considerable amount of general information, but it often seems to be randomly presented. The writer shows basic control of simple sentences, but the three-point essay has little sentence variety. Word choice is usually appropriate to the content; however, the writer may rely on general rather than specific language. Elaboration may be sketchy.

Organizational Pattern. A three-point report stays on topic but may shift focus. It seems to be developed sentence by sentence with little evidence of a coherent pattern. Although the reader can understand the major ideas, there may be irrelevant details, digressions, or repetitions.

Stance. Writers of three-point reports may seem interested in informing the reader.

However, writers often rely more on opinion than on facts to develop their reports.

Score Point 2 – Little Evidence of Achievement

Controlling Idea. A two-point report may have a simple statement of subject. Readers may have difficulty discerning the writer's intent.

Elaboration and Support. Writers may provide information, but it is usually random, disconnected, and unfocused. A two-point report lacks specific details, or it is all specific details with no overriding idea or organizational pattern. The writer exhibits little control of sentence structure. Word choice is limited, relying on simple, imprecise words, and some words may be inappropriate or inappropriately used.

Organizational Pattern. A two-point report does not reveal a coherent pattern of organization, has little sense of progression, and is underdeveloped generally.

Stance. Writers of two-point reports lack either interest or self-confidence in their subject.

Score Point 1 – Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Controlling Idea. The report may have a simple statement of subject without a controlling idea.

Elaboration and Support. The one-point report does not deliver much information. It may present opinions rather than details. Occasionally, a one-point paper will contain some details but it may be completely lacking in content.

Organizational Pattern. The one-point report is poorly organized and sometimes incoherent. The reader is frequently unsure about the relationship between sentences and ideas. It may be too brief for a pattern to be discernible.

Stance. The essay will usually reveals little or no awareness of subject and no self-confidence or authority.

Unscorable – Inappropriate Response

Off topic. No response. Written in a foreign language.

High School Writing Guide

Speculation About Causes and Effects

Speculating about causes and effects requires writers to conjecture about causes or to predict the effects of a given situation, event, or trend. Conjecture about causes requires analysis of existing states of events or situations, while prediction invites the kinds of divergent thinking that mark the behavior of the most creative scientists, artists, and writers. While the thinking strategies differ in these significant ways, they have in common the speculative turn of mind that engages both seriously and playfully in the "how did" and the "what if."

Students might speculate about why California's Japanese Americans were moved to relocation camps during World War II (history), why the numbers of homeless people have risen so dramatically in the last decade (current social problems), why Huck Finn sets out for the Territory (literature), why the football team had such a disappointing year (journalism), or why regional theaters have come to play an important cultural role in America (drama). These assignments all involve speculating about the causes of events, trends, or phenomena.

Students might also speculate about effects or results: what will be the effects of (a) increasing numbers of women being elected to political office (government); (b) a high illiteracy rate in America (current social problems); (c) substituting an alternative ending for *Huckleberry Finn* (literature); or (d) postponing action on reducing global warming (science). Since the causes and effects of these subjects cannot be definitively known, writers must speculate—must create a plausible argument for the causes and effects they propose.

Speculation about causes and effects, controversial issue, evaluation, and interpretation are the four types of argumentative writing that California assesses at grade ten. Speculation about causes and effects is also related to other types of writing. It takes from autobiographical incident, report of information, and observational writing the abilities to narrate brief anecdotes and to observe and gather data. It contributes to the reflective essay in that writers may discover an insight into the human condition by speculating about what stimulated the reflection or wondering about effects that might emerge.

Importance of Speculation Writing

We form opinions and make judgments every day—sometimes without thinking, other times

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after careful consideration. Life is full of choices and decisions, and our maturity is measured by our ability to see multiple perspectives, to consider causal evidence, to arrive at logical conclusions, and to make plausible predictions. The domain of speculation about causes and effects encompasses all of these processes.

Writing to explore our understanding of the world around us not only develops thinking skills but also assists in the maturation process. Making rash decisions and jumping to hasty conclusions or wrong accusations create injustices and prejudices—decisions based on insufficient evidence. The ability to distinguish among a fact, an inference, an assumption, and an opinion requires writers to broaden their base of evidence in order to arrive at a reasoned, persuasive argument. Consequently, writers expand their horizons and grow as thinkers.

Argument to support one's speculations is important not only in high school assignments across the curriculum (these are detailed in later sections) but also in many writing situations outside of school. For example, a newspaper columnist or an editorial writer might propose causes for a surprising election defeat, a decline in new housing construction, or the failure of a bond issue. A sportswriter for a national magazine might try to explain why a professional baseball team owner was unable to move his team to another city, why the Pacific Ten nearly always defeats the Big Ten in the Rose Bowl, or what will be the effects of the NCAA's revised eligibility rules for college athletes.

Business leaders probe the causes behind sales trends or employee satisfaction or speculate about the benefits (effects) of buying a new computer or phone system, opening a new plant, shifting more production to Taiwan or Mexico, relying on more part-time than full-time workers, or borrowing more money. Doctors examine patients to analyze what might have caused their symptoms. Educators analyze why some teaching techniques work and others do not, how parents might contribute to students' achievement, or why some schools receive higher overall test scores than others. Congressional staffers analyze trends in unemployment, energy, health-care needs, or voting patterns in order to make recommendations to representatives or senators. Quite clearly, speculation about causes and effects is a familiar and important writing situation; high school students' education would be incomplete without many occasions to develop this technique.

Characteristics of Speculation About Causes and Effects

Analysis of causes or possible effects involves speculating about a phenomenon, trend, or event for which there is inconclusive or uncertain evidence and requires the writer to support a proposed explanation. A student summarizing the most commonly accepted causes of the Civil War is neither speculating nor presenting an argument; the student is only reporting established information. By contrast, a political analyst predicting the effects that a particular candidate's run for the presidency could have on the political issues of the campaign is both conjecturing about possibilities and presenting an argument. A school newspaper reporter, attempting to explain the loss of a water polo game that the team was favored to win is also involved in causal analysis.

The main features of writing that involves speculation about causes and effects are described in the paragraphs that follow.

Situation

Writers describe the situation (usually a phenomenon, trend, or event) and present it clearly to their readers. They are sensitive to the reader's level of awareness. They present statistics, examples, anecdotes, or evidence to help define the situation for the reader.

Speculation

Writers speculate confidently about the possible causes and effects of a situation. Since there is uncertainty about what caused something or about what might result from it, writers try to persuade readers that their speculations are plausible.

Reasons or Evidence

Writers present a fully developed, convincing argument for their speculations. They offer support for each proposed cause and effect because they cannot assume that their speculations will be automatically accepted and understood. The support is fully elaborated or inventively argued. In arguing to support their speculations, writers may use some or all of the following strategies:

- Citing historical evidence, facts, expert opinions, statistics, anecdotes from per-

sonal experience, or examples from literature
- Considering obvious as well as hidden causes and results
- Considering alternative causes and effects
- Considering and refuting possible counterarguments without insulting those who hold them

Exemplary Student Essay

The following essay speculates about why some parents push young children to achieve. Comments in brackets indicate the strengths of this essay and annotate the special features of essays speculating about the causes of phenomena. Following this essay is an account of the classroom activities and students' responses that led to this draft.

Why Parents Push Young Children to Achieve

by Serena Goldsmith

"Come on dear, practice your violin."

"Can't I play in the sandbox instead, mommy?"

This type of conversation is becoming more and more common in some American households with small children. Many children today are pushed by their parents to learn more at a very young age. Instead of learning the English alphabet in preschool, they are already learning the alphabets of foreign languages. Instead of playing with blocks, they are writing programs on a computer. Soon they are in classes for children too young to attend school, classes introducing children to subjects that were once considered way beyond their years. There is a compulsion in our society to produce pre-kindergarten "superkids"! Why are some parents pushing their kids so hard, especially since some dangers of doing so are now known? There are many reasons, and they have to do with societal pressures and parents' needs, as much as with children's needs.

[Opens with dialogue that dramatizes the situation to be speculated about. Describes the situation fully enough for readers to recognize it and know exactly which phenomenon is to be speculated about. "Why" question (and the essay's title) signals causal speculation. Readers assume that the student will limit herself to speculating about why some parents push young children to achieve. She will not primarily argue her position on the issue (controversial issue), though she does make her position clear, nor will she propose a solution to the problem (problem solution). Final sentence forecasts the main causes (or reasons).]

The "superkid" phenomenon started with the knowledge that younger children learn some things faster than older children or adults. For instance, they can pick up foreign languages much easier. Some parents, upon hearing about these studies, have been only too eager to create their own little geniuses by exposing their children to as much knowledge as possible before they turn five.

[First cause: knowledge that young children learn some things faster than adults]

Another reason for the superkid phenomenon might be that nearly all parents want the best for their children. It seems natural for parents to do everything possible to get their children off to a strong start on having a successful life. This natural inclination cannot explain the superkid push, however, because many knowledgeable parents make a point of not *pushing their children too fast at too young an age, and they want the best for their children, too. The cause of it goes well beyond wanting the best. It has to do with the motivations of parents who start their children learning complicated things sooner than necessary.*

[Here the student considers and refutes an alternative cause by arguing that parents who know that their children can learn some things exceptionally fast nevertheless choose not to push them.]

Parents who buy into superkid training programs may be the kind of parents who compete with other parents about the size of houses, the most exotic vacation, and the latest hightech car. If so, there's no reason why they wouldn't also compete over how much their children can learn at an early age. Superkids are a creation of their parents, and a creation that requires so much work over many months and years is something to brag about to the neighbors or even to parents' brothers and sisters. In this way cousins can compete against cousins to give the aunts and uncles something to brag about.

[Second cause: parents competing with other parents]

Parents may also be trying to live their lives through their children. Suppose a mother always wanted to be an Olympic gymnast, but could not get the proper training when she was young. The mother enrolls her child in gymnastic classes at age two, so that the child can be the star that the mother always wanted to be. Although the child is too young to make the decision of whether or not she wants to be a gymnast, the mother makes the decision for her so that she can realize her dream through her child. Parents sometimes want to give their children the opportunities that they themselves never had. When

parents go about this desperately or obsessively, however, young children can suffer.

[Third cause: parents trying to live their lives through their children (Notice the imaginative "what-if" argument.)]

Society is also responsible for encouraging the superkid phenomenon by equating success with intelligence and achievement. Although America has not reached the extremes of Japan, where children must get into a good kindergarten in order to get into a good college, we are leaning more and more in that direction. Because colleges are increasingly competitive, and most high paying jobs require college degrees, parents feel more pressure to make their children smarter. By educating their children at a young age, they feel they are giving them a head start for success.

[Fourth cause: societal pressures]

The superkid syndrome may unfortunately benefit the parents more than the child. Parents think that they are pushing their children to learn because they want the best for them, but they also want to look good as parents in a competitive society. They want to believe that their children are brighter than the rest, and they want them to fulfill their own unrealized ambitions. In pushing their three-year-old to learn too much too fast, however, they may be forgetting that he still has many more years to grow, learn, and discover for himself his own strengths and interests.

[Conclusion brings essay to an appropriate close]

One Student's Writing Process

This section outlines the classroom writing process that Serena Goldsmith completed, along with other students, to produce the revision appearing in the previous section. It also illustrates two important stages in the writing process: (1) listing and analyzing likely causes of her subject; and (2) peer response to her draft.

It is highly unlikely that a student could produce an essay like Goldsmith's without the benefit of planned invention or prewriting activities. California's writing assessment encourages students to learn to compose confidently in a variety of academic and world-of-work writing situations, and it sets a high standard for their work. Students are unlikely to learn the possibilities of a writing situation like speculation about causes and effects without focused instruction and responses to work-in-progress from teachers and their fellow students. This section and the next suggest several possibilities. There is, of course, no single formula for prewriting, drafting, or responding to any particular writing type.

Goldsmith's teacher asked her and the other students to complete prewriting activities detailed in the section "Activities and Assignments." Here we outline these and focus on Goldsmith's unedited response to one of them.

Prewriting

Prewriting involves selecting a topic, analyzing readers, and listing and analyzing causes. Goldsmith began by listing possible subjects and choosing one: causes of parents' pushing their young children to learn and achieve. Then she listed possible reasons (causes) why parents would push their children. Here is her list:

parents' pride
parents want best for their children
competitiveness with other parents
want intelligent child (college—equals success)
studies show that young children learn faster
more women in work force—working mothers want girls to be able to get good jobs
parents try to fulfill their own unrealized ambitions through their children

At this point she knew she had a workable topic. Her next step, before shaping and developing her speculative arguments, was to identify and analyze her readers. Her teacher encouraged students to think about readers who would be interested in the subject, needed to know more about it, or could possibly be influenced by the argument. He also wanted them to choose readers to whom they could write with some authority. Goldsmith chose to write for a parents' magazine of the kind sold in supermarkets or chain bookstores.

Now she was in a position to select causes that might, if well argued, seem plausible (or possibly even convincing) to her readers. Returning to her previous list, she chose four promising causes and set up a causes/analysis chart like Figure 7 on the next page. She listed each cause and then analyzed it, noting why she thought her readers would find it plausible, likely, or convincing, and what questions or objections they might have.

At this point, Goldsmith met with two other students to report on progress and to explain their plans for developing their arguments. To strengthen each argument, the group tried to suggest further causes or objections. The group suggested to Goldsmith that the obvious or alter-

native reason that parents have for pushing their children could be their desires for their children to succeed in school, get good jobs, and have rewarding lives. She added that reason to her causes/analysis chart, and it eventually became an important paragraph in her essay.

Goldsmith could have paused to research superkids, a subject on which much has been published recently. Her instructor had decided, however, that he wanted students to push their own speculative powers as far as they could on this assignment, without being influenced by others. This possibility for research is a reminder, nevertheless, that speculation about causes and effects (like several types of writing) can be expanded to become substantial library research projects. Researching this topic would have enabled Goldsmith to provide a more elaborated and vivid description of the phenomenon than appeared in her final version and would have involved her in the challenging process of evaluating and accommodating or refuting others' speculations. Had she chosen to speculate about a trend (instead of a phenomenon), she would have been obliged to do research in order to demonstrate that a trend does exist—it began during a specific time, and its influence has been increasing and decreasing over a period of months or years.

The First Draft

After outlining her essay, Goldsmith wrote this first unedited draft:

Children today are pushed by their parents to learn more at a very young age. Instead of learning the English alphabet in preschool, they are already learning foreign alphabets. Instead of playing with blocks, they are playing the violin or programming on the computer. Many classes have been created for young children and their parents to introduce the

Causes	Analysis
young children learn some things faster than older children	*most parents probably know this justifies pushing children* *might know about some dangers of early pushing* *may believe that young kids can learn anything faster, when that's not true*
parents competing with each other	*seems possible since adults and families compete with each other in many ways* *parents might not be aware of this* *might object—not competition but just wanting the best for my child*
parents living their lives through their children	*parents do this in other ways, too—a frustrated singer or dancer who forces her child to become an entertainer or a frustrated gymnast who puts a child of two in gymnastics class* *might object—but sometimes this can be the best thing for a child, giving focus and direction early*
societal pressures	*nearly all parents must feel this, would find it convincing* *excuses parents who push?—it's beyond my control, I have to do it*

Fig. 7. Student analysis of causes

children to subjects that were once considered way beyond their years. Why is there such a rush to educate children before they are old enough to enter kindergarten?

One of the causes of this phenomenon are the studies that have been done that show children can pick up things easier at an early age. It has been found that children can learn languages much easier when they are young. They are more impressionable at a young age, and seem to absorb knowledge like a sponge. Parents, upon hearing these studies, have been only too eager to expose their children to as much knowledge as possible.

It is instinctive for parents to want the best for their children. They want their children to succeed and be the best that they can be. If they can achieve this for their children by enrolling them in art appreciation classes at the age of three, then that's what they'll do. They want to give their child all the advantages at an early age, and they think they can do that by teaching them young. Sometimes parents have their own selfish reasons for creating a "superkid," also.

Parents want to be proud of their children and by encouraging them to be "superkids," their child is smart, they feel proud. So they try to train/get their child to be as smart as possible. It gives the parents a sense of self-esteem if their child can outshine the others. So competition plays a part in it. They want their child to be able to compete with the other children their age, the parents are competing with the other children's parents through their children.

Society has equated intelligence (achievement?) with success. Because colleges have become more competitive, and most high paying jobs require college degrees, parents feel more pressure to make their children smarter. By starting to educate their kids at a young age, they feel they are giving them a head start for success. Because society has placed more emphasis on the importance of education, parents have responded by educating their children at younger and younger ages.

Parents may also be trying to live their lives through their children. Suppose a mother always wanted to be an Olympic gymnast, but could not get the proper training at an early enough age. The mother enrolls her child in gymnastic classes at age two, so that the child can be the star that the mother wanted to be. Parents want to give their children opportunities that they themselves haven't had. They want their children to be successful, so that they can feel successful. Although the child is too young to make the decision of whether or not she wants to be a gymnast, the mother makes the decision for her so that she can realize her dream through her child.

The "superkid" syndrome may benefit the parents more than the child. If the child acts like a sponge to absorb knowledge isn't it possible that the sponge will become saturated? Parents think that they are pushing their children to learn because they want the best for them, but they also want the best for themselves. They want to believe that their child is brighter than the rest, and they want him to do the things that they were not able to do. However, in exposing their three-year old to the world, they may be forgetting that he still has many more years to grow and learn and discover for himself his own strengths and interests.

Response and Revision to Goldsmith's Essay

In the next section classroom responses to speculation essays-in-progress are discussed, and guidelines for students are presented. How one student used one set of the guidelines to respond helpfully to Goldsmith's draft is shown.

The guidelines follow:

1. Determine whether the trend or phenomenon is well defined. Has the writer established that it exists? What kind of evidence is offered?

   Yes, the trend is established well, with examples of superkid situations. What about educational toys? For your readers it's probably ok to refer to studies without giving names or statistics. Too bad you can't give names of accelerated preschools or describe one.

2. Focus on the proposed cause or causes. Are there too many? Can you think of causes the writer has overlooked? Are any of the suggested causes actually results? Is the argument for the causes convincing? How might it be improved?

   I think your causes are causes *and seem to make sense. The argument adds up and seems strong but you seem to be in a hurry. More evidence and examples would help—to interest readers and try to convince them. You sound confident but maybe more examples would make you sound like an expert.*

3. Look for counterarguments (readers' objections and questions). Identify any you find. Does the writer anticipate and refute likely counterarguments? Is this refutation convincing? Can you think of other counterarguments?

I don't see any counterarguments. Perhaps you could point out some possible good points of trying to raise superkids and then refute them or accept them.

4. Look at the treatment of alternative causes (causes readers might prefer to use to explain the event, trend, or phenomenon). Are they clearly presented? Is the argument against them convincing? Why or why not?

Is your mentioning that it is instinctive for parents to want the best for their children an alternative cause? You seem to accept it and not argue against it. Do you want to do that? I guess sponge theory is like an alternative cause. You question it but don't argue it.

5. Consider the organization of the essay. Are the causes presented in an effective order? Can you suggest a better order?

I think the order looks good.

6. Pay particular attention to the way the writer starts and concludes the essay. Is the beginning engaging enough to make you want to read further? Can you think of other ways to open the essay? Does the essay conclude decisively?

Beginning needs more punch. Ending seems effective, but maybe you could say more about the dangers and drawbacks of raising a superkid.

Revision of Goldsmith's Essay

Ready to revise, Goldsmith had the advantage of this response from a classmate. In addition, she had a very brief (she remembers it as about five minutes) conference with her teacher, who suggested she try to counter the predictable objection that whatever the possible dangers of raising your child as a superkid, the benefits to the child outweigh the dangers.

As Goldsmith worked out her revision, she benefited greatly from these responses. A careful comparison of her draft and revision reveals that she made the following major changes and improvements:

- Opened with a brief bit of dialogue and added more examples of the superkid phenomenon to her first paragraph.
- Changed draft paragraph 3 from a cause which undercut her argument (parents want the best) to an alternative cause to be refuted. This important change also helps her qualify her claim to limit it to parents who push their children obsessively or unreasonably. She might have placed this material in the first paragraph to limit the definition of the phenomenon.
- Changed the concept of pride in the fourth paragraph of the first draft to competition and developed that cause more fully with examples.
- Dropped the trite "sponge" image. It was also misleading because it suggested that young children could learn all things—not just a few things—faster than older children.

After talking with her response group and reviewing their suggestions, the student revised her draft. Her final draft is the exemplary essay in the previous section.

Prewriting Strategies

As is true with all of the writing types, no formula exists for writing speculation essays. As is also true, students need to engage in thoughtful prewriting strategies in order to develop the patterns of thinking that allow them to write with confidence and control, whether they are writing to a deadline, to demonstrate achievement, or for particular academic or job-related projects.

Speculation essays most often address issues of change, whether it has already occurred, as in speculating about causes, or is yet to happen, as in speculating about effects. One useful way to initiate speculative thinking is to have students brainstorm categories of change.

Kinds of *change* that might be explored are:

physical	social
emotional	economic
ecological	political
cultural	medical
educational	technological

Brainstorming might take any number of forms: clusters, maps, lists, drawings, outlines, or quickwrites.

As an example of how to use a number of prewriting activities, a general speculative as-

signment follows. Seven steps, listed under "Prewriting Suggestions," lead to the initial draft.

The General Assignment

The following general assignment can be particularized in countless ways in all disciplines, but it is useful in itself because students may choose their own topics:

> Write an essay speculating about why some event, phenomenon, or trend has occurred. The phenomenon or trend may be one you have observed firsthand, one you learned about in the news, or one you are learning about now in a course. Your essay should do two things: (1) demonstrate the existence of the phenomenon or trend; and (2) offer possible causes for it. Your purpose is to convince your readers that your proposed causes are plausible.
>
> Or write an essay speculating about the likely effects or results of an event, trend, or phenomenon.
>
> An *event* is a specific occurrence like the loss of an election by a local or state official who was expected to win or a change in rules governing extracurricular activities at your school. A *phenomenon* is a continuing state of affairs like homelessness, alcohol abuse by some teenagers, or poor attendance at your school. A *trend* is a changing pattern over time, a demonstrable increase or decrease in something, like the increasing number of teenagers who work part-time, increasing costs of going to college, increasing numbers of women elected to public office, or decreasing incidence of anorexia nervosa (starving oneself to extreme thinness) among teenagers and young adults.

A Writing Process Sequence

Some teachers use this sequence of activities for speculation about causes and effects assignments, varying it from one use to the next, depending on the writing abilities of students in a particular class, whether the speculation assignment is a first or subsequent one, or how much time is available for writing process activities. This sequence is only one of many possible scenarios.

In pairs or small groups, students can work collaboratively at several points in the sequence: for example, at Step 2 to evaluate each other's subject choices; at Step 3 to extend the list of causes and effects; or at Step 7 to try out their plans and argumentative strategies.

Prewriting Suggestions

Prewriting suggestions are described in the following seven steps:

Step 1. List or cluster possible subjects (phenomena, events, or trends). (The teacher may spend about 15 minutes with the whole class illustrating each type of subject and taking further suggestions from students.) See suggestions in the section "Classroom Writing Assignments" for lists of possible subjects.

Step 2. From your list, or cluster, choose a subject you would like to write about and describe it in a few sentences. Decide whether you will be conjecturing about causes or predicting possible effects.

Step 3. Make a list of possible causes and effects of your subject. List obvious causes and effects; then try to think of ones that are not so obvious. When you have explored all possibilities, write at least three more. Do not worry if they seem strange or impossible.

Step 4. Decide on your most likely audience. Write for several minutes about the readers whom you will be trying to convince that your proposed causes and effects are plausible. Who are they and what do they already know about your subject?

Step 5. Now that you have analyzed your potential readers, you are ready to begin shaping your argument. Divide a page in half, and, on the left, list the causes and effects (from your list in Step 3) most likely to convince your readers, skipping three or four lines between each one. You may have one, two, or several reasons. On the right side of the page, write some phrases explaining why you think each cause and effect will be convincing for your readers. Think about any objections or questions they may have about each cause and effect and write these objections in the right-hand column.

Step 6. Gather additional information that will help you describe the event, trend, or

phenomenon more fully and enable you to argue more convincingly for your proposed causes and effects. Your research may involve reading articles or books; it may also involve interviewing people or taking a survey. If you research others' proposed causes and effects, you may mention them in your essay; but you must evaluate them as well, that is, tell how convincing you think they are. Remember that you are using research to write an original speculative argument.

Step 7. Map or write a brief outline of your essay. Include a description of the event, trend, or phenomenon; each of your causes and effects; and readers' major objections or questions. Remember that this outline is tentative; you may need to change it once you start writing.

Drafting the Essay

Write your rough draft. Try to engage your readers' interest at the beginning. Describe your subject so that readers will know what you are speculating about. As you write about each of your causes and effects, remember that you must convince your readers that each is plausible. Argue for each one with examples or anecdotes. End on a strong note. Your tone must create a favorable impression so that readers will take your speculation seriously.

With a draft in hand, students then meet in pairs or small groups to give each other advice about revising. They could use the response guidelines in the next section, "Response and Revision."

Response and Revision

Response from others, especially peers, is necessary for student writers to develop a sense of audience, a sense that their writing reaches a number of interested people, including their teacher. When others look at their work, students gain a sense of purpose. They realize that they write to communicate, not merely to earn a grade. Peers see other students' writing processes and learn from the successes and failures of their classmates. Students in workshop or response groups must read for meaning, thinking about what is good in the writing and what might be improved. They then communicate this information to the writer.

Students can respond to each other's writing in pairs or in small groups. Effective, constructive response requires both coaching and practice. Modeling the process with the whole class provides a good introduction: the teacher talks about a draft, familiarizing students with relevant terms and rhetorical concepts, introducing stylistic considerations, and showing how to ask challenging questions. Continued modeling by the teacher within each small group can introduce new response approaches and help students reach higher and more effective levels of this response process.

In the following examples of peer-response guides, students are supposed to have already been collaborating in prewriting activities.

Response Guideline 1

Working together, make a chart listing the causes and effects the writer has proposed and the details included to explain the following:

Situation: _____

Cause or effect	Details
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Closure: _____

Questions/Suggestions:

- What area needs more information?
- What caused confusion?
- What would you add?

Response Guideline 2

Working with partners or in small groups, writers can learn from their response partners how their writing affects others. The following suggestions may be helpful to teachers in designing guides for students to use both in dis-

cussion and in preparing written responses. Teachers or students may select questions appropriate to their purposes for specific assignments or stages in an assignment.

Questions for responding to a paper about speculation about causes and effects follow:

- Presenting the situation
  How did the writer describe the event he or she is speculating about? Is the description clear enough for you to understand what happened? List one or two of the writer's most precise words.
  Is there anything about the event you want to understand more clearly? Ask the writer a question.
- Making speculations
  On what types of information does the writer base his or her speculation?
    Historical facts
    Opinion of experts
    Common beliefs accepted as true
    Scientific facts
    Eyewitness reports
    Ideas from a story
    Personal knowledge
  Do the effects seem logical to you? Explain your response to the writer.
- Developing the organization
  Is the paper organized so that the ideas flow smoothly and logically?
  If not, how can the writer make the organization better?
- Elaborating effects
  What causes and effects seemed the most convincing to you? Why do you say that?
  List some of the details that you found interesting.
- Coming to closure
  Did the writer draw conclusions, present problems with possible solutions, or make evaluations?
  Was the ending satisfactory to you? Do you have any suggestions for improving the ending?

Response Guideline 3

Read the draft through quickly to get a sense of what it has to say. Write a few sentences summarizing your first impression. How convincing do you think the intended readers will find the essay? What will they like best? What will they object to or question? What seem to be the most interesting and effective parts of the essay?

Then read the draft again, analyzing it closely as you respond in writing to each of the tasks that follow. As you respond, keep in mind the writer's readers and the purpose. Your goal is to give advice that will help the writer improve the draft to make it more convincing for its intended readers.

1. Determine whether the trend or phenomenon is well defined. Has the writer established its existence? What kind of evidence is offered to establish that the trend or phenomenon exists?
2. Focus on the proposed cause or causes, effect and effects. Are there too many? Too few? Can you think of causes and effects the writer has overlooked? Are any of the suggested causes actually results? Is the argument for the causes and effects convincing? How might it be improved?
3. Look for counterarguments (readers' objections and questions). Identify any you find. Does the writer anticipate and refute likely counterarguments? Are the refutations convincing? Tell the writer how to strengthen them. Can you think of other counterarguments? List any you can think of.
4. Look at the treatment of alternative causes and effects (causes or effects readers might prefer to use to explain the event, trend, or phenomenon). Are they clearly presented? Is the argument against them convincing? Why or why not? Advise the writer on strengthening it.
5. Consider the organization of the essay. Are the causes presented in an effective order? Can you suggest a better order? Look for a part that could be more effective if placed earlier or later.
6. Pay particular attention to the way the writer starts and concludes the essay. Is the beginning engaging enough to make you want to read further? Can you think of other ways to open the essay? Does the essay conclude decisively? Help the writer improve the conclusion.

Before a writer exchanges drafts, he or she must tell the responder the purpose and identify intended readers of the essay.

After students have written their responses to each other's drafts (the writing records the advice for the writer to use later when revising), they can meet to discuss the responses.

When students have revised their essays, they can share them in a read-around.

Classroom Writing Assignments

Speculative thinking is both appropriate and necessary to every discipline, from history to English to science to physical education. As a preface to specific assignments for several academic disciplines, material designed to introduce the basic concepts of speculative essays is included. The purposes, tasks, requirements, and samples of speculative thinking are examined.

Purposes

The purposes of this type of writing are (1) to speculate or conjecture about the *causes* of a given situation, event, or trend; or (2) to speculate or predict possible *effects* (outcomes or consequences) of a given event or phenomenon.

Tasks

Show a clear understanding of the situation to be speculated about and describe it so that the reader can clearly understand it.

Demonstrate a broad base of knowledge associated with the situation.

Present effects from the initial situation.

Show a plausible relationship between the situation and its possible effect.

Elaborate by choosing details relevant to the cause and its effects.

Choose details that are valid within the framework of the writer's own boundaries.

Requirements

The Situation. Present the situation (usually a phenomenon, trend, or event) clearly, using rich detail and concrete language, but do not let the description of the situation dominate the essay.

Establish clearly the boundaries in which the speculation about causes and effects will occur.

Show sensitivity to the reader's awareness level in describing and/or explaining the situation.

Demonstrate a broad base of knowledge associated with the situation.

The Speculation. Keep speculations clearly related to the situation; show the plausible relationship between the situation and its possible causes and effects.

Draw conjectures from a variety of sources, including historical facts, opinions of experts, common beliefs, scientific facts, eyewitness reports, information found in text, statistics, or writers' own original ideas as they consider the "what if" effects of a situation.

See the situation from a variety of perspectives.

Acknowledge the possible questions and objections of the reader.

Present a succession of causes.

Present speculations in an organized fashion (for example, least to most important; chronological, and so forth).

Use transitions to connect convincingly the speculations to the situation.

Present a scenario predicting effects or showing causes in story form.

Elaboration. Choose details that are relevant to the situation and its proposed causes and effects.

Provide sufficient elaboration to convince the reader that the predictions or conjectures are valid within the framework of the writer's own boundaries.

Offer inventive, fully elaborated support for each proposed cause and effect.

Possible elaboration strategies are:

Citing historical evidence, facts, expert opinions, statistics, anecdotes from personal experience, or examples from literature

Considering alternative causes and effects

Considering and refuting possible counterarguments without insulting those who hold those arguments

Citing analogous situations

Citing personal observations and experiences

Samples of Speculative Thinking

Because:	Then (what has happened)
1. Governor Reagan emptied the state's mental hospitals in the 1970s. 2. Unemployment has increased. 3. The working poor cannot afford housing.	*We have a growing number of homeless on the streets.*

If . . .	Then (what *might* happen)
there were no sunshine for three months.	*1. People would become more depressed.* *2. It would be impossible to get a natural tan.* *3. Plants would grow more slowly or possibly die.* *4. The days would probably become colder.*

Language Arts

1. Assign students a story from which you have removed the ending. They read the incomplete story and then write a possible ending that is consistent in tone, style, theme, and character with what has gone before. Then, ask them to write an explanation for why their ending is appropriate. They will be speculating about the effects of ending the story in a particular way.
2. Here is another version of the first assignment:

   Imagine that you are the author of (title of a story or novel) and have written the story (or novel) up to this point. You are considering several possible endings for the novel, possibilities consistent with the style, tone, character, and story line you have developed so far.

   Write a letter to your publisher, who has read the novel up to this point. This publisher has been your trusted adviser on all your previous novels. In your letter describe two or three endings briefly and speculate about how each might be appropriate given what you have already written. Help your editor understand the promise of each possible ending.

   You may want to mention the advantages and disadvantages of each ending. You may want to compare or contrast them as a way of speculating about which one would be best. You may remain undecided about which ending would be best, or you may convince your editor that one is the best. Remember that you must support your speculations and arguments with details of plot, action, and character from the already written portion of your unfinished novel.
3. Here is a wide array of speculation assignments based on specific literary texts. Needless to say, there can be no correct response to these assignments, only more or less convincing responses.

   Analyze the motives of the main characters in selected short stories, plays, or novels. For example:

   - Why do the grandparents in "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird" treat the cameraman so rudely?
   - Why does Buddy succeed and Charley fail in "Sweet Potato Pie"?
   - Why does the niece lie to Frampton in "The Open Window"?
   - What has caused the need for Montressor's intense revenge ("The Cask of the Amontillado")?
   - Why does Charley need Verna ("Of Missing Persons")?
   - Why does the daughter in "Gaston" change?
   - Why does the family in *The Raisin in the Sun* want to move to the suburbs so badly?

   Explain the actions of Antony in Act 3, Scene 3, of *Julius Caesar*. Why

does he respond as he does to Caesar's death? Why does he shake hands with the murderers and praise Caesar at the same time? What has brought another side of his character to light?

From an American literature text, what might be the effects of taking seriously the following:

- Edwards' sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"
- Franklin's virtues or his method of organizing his day
- Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death"
- Emerson's "Self-Reliance"
- Any notion of Thoreau

From an American literature text, speculate about the causes of:

- Tom Walker's willingness to compact with the devil in Irving's "The Devil and Tom Walker"
- Thoreau's hidden agenda for going into the woods
- Chief Joseph's speech, "I Will Fight No More Forever"
- Richard Cory's suicide or Miniver Cheever's alcoholism
- J. Alfred Prufrock's view of the world, especially his self-image
- The speaker's teasing in William Carlos Williams' "This Is Just to Say"
- The poet's sense of what poetry is in "Ars Poetica" by MacLeish
- The speaker's attitude in Auden's "The Unknown Citizen"
- The popularity of Wilder's *Our Town*

In addition to writing speculative essays based on literature, students in English can write essays that speculate about the causes and effects of a wide range of events, trends, and phenomena.

4. Speculate about possible causes of events like these:

   - Recent events at your school, such as the resignation of a popular teacher; a change in rules for attendance, behavior, or extracurricular activities; loss of a game by a favored team; or a violent act by one student or group against another student or group
   - Events in your neighborhood or community, such as a public protest by an activist group, loss of an election by an official expected to win, an unusually successful parade or cleanup campaign, or a disappointing zoning decision
   - A national or international event that especially interests you

5. Speculate about the likely effects or results of recent events like these:

   - A change in your school's schedule, curriculum, counseling, or tutoring services, or rules for attendance or behavior
   - A change in your community's traffic laws or a decision to close a school, not to raise taxes to support schools, or to limit water use

   Note: These topics suggest possibilities for speculating about the effects of actual events, but they also suggest "what if" speculations about similar topics: What if our school's curriculum or rules of attendance were changed? What would be the likely effects?

6. Speculate about the causes of phenomena like poor attendance at your school, outstanding sports teams or musical groups, low or high school spirit, lack of interest in studying or learning, low or high scores on state tests, high incidence of alcohol use among teenagers, racial prejudice, changes in clothing styles, low numbers of female students interested in mathematics or science, or the popularity of a certain teacher or course.
7. Speculate about the causes and effects of certain human traits such as selfishness, fear of success, fear of failure, lack of confidence, fickleness, jealousy, envy, curiosity, creativity, health or fitness, popularity, or leadership.
8. Speculate about the causes of trends like these: changing patterns in entertainment, religious life, politics, local government, achievement of students at your school, or technology; increasing numbers of women working, unmarried

teenagers having babies, homeless people, or low-paying service jobs; or increasing costs of going to college.

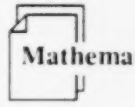
Note: Speculating about trends requires the writer to prove that the trend does exist—increasing or decreasing over time. These subjects may require library research to find evidence of the increase or decrease.

Two pieces of writing could serve as interesting springboards for speculating about causes and effects in a science class. One, Ray Bradbury's short story, "Sound of Thunder," follows a hunting party back in time. On an expedition to kill dinosaurs, one character accidentally steps off the path and kills a butterfly. Unknown to him, this event upsets the causal chain. When the party returns to the present, they find their world still familiar but a bit askew.

Also concerned about the causal chain, Lewis Lapham, editor of *Harper's* magazine, gathered together a group of genetic engineering experts to discuss the possible consequences of three proposed technologies: fetal brain implants, sex determination before conception, and genetic profiles of test-tube babies. The panel considered the scientific and economic implications of the possibilities, as well as their potential impact on human values. Their dialogue is reported in a highly interesting article in the September, 1987, issue of *Harper's* magazine, "Ethics in Embryo."

The following writing ideas are outgrowths from these areas of speculation:

- How might the causal chain be affected if we were to kill off the 1,300 or so grizzly bears left in the world? In your speculation, consider both the advantages and disadvantages of maintaining the grizzly population.
- Paving over the land to develop more cities is causing weather changes. Speculate about the effects of these changes.
- Why is the ozone layer diminishing? What do you think will be the most significant effects of this depletion?
- Speculate about the effects of research in plant growth that allows us to sculpt plants as we want them. How might this affect people's preferences?
- Scientists have developed an artificially engineered bacteria that will prevent strawberries from freezing. Speculate about the effects that introducing an unknown bacteria such as this might have on the environment.
- Imagine your brain in the body of some well-known famous public figure. Consider the body's effect on your brain as well as your brain's effect on the body.



Mathematics naturally lends itself to a causal analysis. Although standard mathematics problems have a "right" answer, students can gain valuable experience in speculative thinking from discussing and writing about open-ended questions.

1. You might present, for example, the following questions:

   - A teacher has a repertoire of eight jokes and tells four of them each semester. How many semesters can he or she go before telling exactly the same four jokes again?
   - If he or she wanted to have the eight jokes last as long as possible, how many jokes should he or she tell each semester?

   When students speculate that the eight jokes will last longer if only three are told each semester, they will have to calculate the validity of their theory. They will soon realize that combinations of eight things taken three at a time is a smaller number than combinations of eight taken four at a time. They will learn the "right" answer through the process of speculating and testing their speculations.
2. Prior to introducing a new mathematical concept, have students predict what is needed to work out the concept. For example, in a lesson introducing angle

measurement, students might be asked to determine the size of the three angles of a triangle. They would then speculate on what information they will need to solve the problem.

History–Social Science

History–social science is also a natural area for speculative writing. Examples of problems to be examined follow:

1. What might have happened if the U.S. had decided not to drop the atomic bomb?
2. What might have happened if Roosevelt had retained Wallace (a pacifist) as his running mate instead of Truman?
3. How might our lives be different if America had lost the Revolutionary War to Great Britain?
4. What if Japan had been the first country to colonize the west coast of America?
5. What if the death penalty were abolished? How would that action affect the state's economy and the rate of crime?
6. How and why did the Monroe Doctrine become a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy by the late nineteenth century?
7. What accounted for the growth between 1940 and 1965 of popular and governmental concern for the position of blacks in American society?
8. The 1920s was a period of tension between new and changing attitudes on the one hand and traditional values and nostalgia on the other. What led to the tension between old and new, and in what ways was the tension manifested?
9. Why did socialism fail to become a major force in American politics between 1900 and 1940 despite widespread dissatisfaction with the social and economic order and significant support for radical movements during that period?
10. How do you account for the failure of Reconstruction (1865–1877) to bring social and economic equality of opportunity to the former slaves?

Guidelines for Writing Prompts for Speculation About Causes and Effects

Speculation about causes and effects requires students to present a given event, trend, or phenomenon, to describe its probable causes and effects, and to attempt to convince particular readers that the causes and effects are plausible. Since speculation about causes and effects is a form of argument, the keys to success are (1) inventive arguing for the plausibility of one or more causes and effects; and (2) a logical sequencing of causes and effects. The student must construct a convincing argument that reveals awareness of particular readers' knowledge and likely questions or objections. It is not appropriate to list causes and effects without arguing for them, to offer solutions to a problem, or to tell a story instead of making a logical argument.

Guidelines for drafting the writing situation and directions for writing for speculation about causes and effects prompts follow. Sample prompts model these guidelines.

Writing Situation

Identify the event, trend, or phenomenon, limiting the description to two to four sentences. Ensure that students readily recognize the event, trend, or phenomenon and have an adequate context for speculating about it.

Then, in a separate paragraph of two or three sentences, identify who is asking the student to write the essay (perhaps the student's English teacher) or where it will be published (perhaps the school newspaper) or who will read it (perhaps other students). Ask the student to "speculate about" either what might be causing the event, trend, or phenomenon or what its effects or results might be. Be sure to use the words *speculate* and *causes* and *effects*.

Directions for Writing

Begin the directions, "Write an essay speculating about the causes (and effects) of . . . ." Be sure that directions include these key terms: *causes* (and *effects*), *speculation*, *reasons*, *evidence*, and *examples*, and *convince* or *convincing*. Do not lead the student by suggesting any other rhetorical features of speculative argument.

Mention again the reader or readers. The final sentence or two should include the words

convince or *purpose* (or both) and refer to readers. Exhort students to convince their readers to "take your speculations seriously" or to acknowledge that "you have thought carefully" about the subject.

Keep sentences relatively brief and the vocabulary accessible for all students. Title the prompt in a way that keeps students focused on the writing situation.

Examples of State Writing Assessment Prompts

Why Do Some People Have Trouble Speaking in Front of Groups?

Writing Situation. We have all had trouble speaking in front of groups, perhaps in church or synagogue, in class, or in front of some other group. We have also seen other people have trouble. Maybe they could not think of much to say, or maybe they forgot what they were going to say.

Your English teacher has asked students in your class to write essays speculating about why many people seem to have trouble speaking in front of groups. These essays will be read by other students who will be interested in your ideas.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay speculating about why many people seem to have trouble speaking in front of groups. You might want to consider different possible causes and argue for them. Use reasons, evidence, and examples to convince your reader that you have identified important causes. Don't just tell stories about times you or others have had trouble speaking in front of groups. Instead, discuss specific causes and argue for them. You want the other students in your class to take your ideas seriously.

Why Are There So Few Women Scientists?

Writing Situation. Many women are working at jobs that used to be considered "man's work," including fire fighters, construction workers, and police officers. Yet, of all the scientists in this country, very few are women.

Your science teacher is curious about this situation. She or he asks students in your class to write an essay speculating about why there are so few women in the sciences. Think about the reasons that might cause women to avoid choosing a career in the sciences.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay speculating about why there are so few women scientists. You do not need to solve the problem. Instead, speculate about the causes of this situation. Support your speculation with examples or other evidence. Convince your teacher that you have thought seriously about why so few women become scientists.

Speculating About Why People Left Earth

Writing Situation. Imagine that you are able to travel forward in time to the year 2080. To your surprise you discover that you are on another planet. There is a colony of humans who speak your language. They tell you that years ago the humans left earth and made this new space colony. No one is living on earth now. When you ask about it, no one remembers what caused humans to leave earth.

Your English teacher has asked you to write an essay speculating about the causes for this strange situation. Think about what reason or reasons seem the most likely to have caused humans to leave the earth.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay for your English teacher, speculating about what might have caused humans to leave earth for good. You want to convince your teacher that your causes are a good explanation. Do not tell a story about what might have happened. Instead, speculate about the causes of humans leaving earth. Support your speculation with examples or other evidence. Convince your teacher that you have thought seriously about these causes.

Why Do People Like to Belong to Groups?

Writing Situation. It seems that almost everyone likes to belong to a group. You probably have a group of friends; and you belong to other groups as well, such as churches, sports teams, classes, or clubs.

You have been talking in your social studies class about why people like to belong to groups. Your teacher has asked students in your class to write essays speculating about the reasons people like to be members of a group.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay speculating about why people like to belong to groups. You will want to consider different possible causes and argue for them. Use reasons, evidence, and examples to convince your teacher that you have identified important causes. You want your teacher to know that you have thought seriously about why people like to belong to groups.

What Are the Effects of Working at Home?

Writing Situation. Computers are rapidly changing our society. One of the predicted changes is that people will rarely have to leave their homes to go to work. People will run banks, stores, and community services from computers in their homes.

In your social studies class, you have been talking about social changes resulting from people working at home. Your teacher has asked students to write essays speculating about the effects of people doing most of their work at home by using computers. Your essay will be read by other students in your class who will be interested in your ideas of how working at home will change our society.

Directions for Writing. Write an essay speculating about the effects of people doing most of their work at home by using computers. Tell the other students how you think this will change our society. You want to convince the other students with examples, reasons, and evidence that the effects you predict could really happen. You want the other students to know that you have thought about this change seriously and that you have good reasons for predicting the effects that you do.

Essays Written for the State Assessment

The essays reprinted here are from field tests of prompts. Since essays were written to these prompts under testing conditions (45 minutes to write a draft), we believe that they illustrate reasonably well what students will do on the actual test. We present the essays unedited.

High-range Achievement

In this example of a high-range paper written under state testing conditions (one draft, 45 minute time limit), the writer produces focused, explicit, causal argument. The situation is more than adequately presented. The three causes the writer offers to explain why some students don't enjoy writing seem plausible. Most important, they are argued with speculations, examples, and qualifications. Reading the essay, we always know exactly where we have been and where we are going: the causes are explicitly announced at paragraph openings, and coherence is high within paragraphs and overall. Much could be done to polish and extend this argument after a conference with a peer response group or an informed writing teacher, but the essay nevertheless reveals impressive achievement in writing that speculates about causes.

Why Some Students Don't Enjoy Writing

by Jonathan Chang

Through the development of language as well as culture, writing becomes an essential part of communication in society. In order to communicate more effectively and efficiently, writing is indeed the method. Not only can writing convey one's thoughts, it can also reveal the writer's creativity as well as knowledge. In essence, writing is part of self-expression. In a world growing in population, writing is the only method through which one can express his ideas to the general population without having to repeat himself as with speech. Nevertheless, writing is also an impediment and therefore some people do not enjoy writing. In this case, the focus is placed upon the student's attitude towards writing.

Some students do not enjoy writing simply because they are incapable. Such problems can be a result of either illiteracy or learning disability. Imagine the difficulty one confronts when he/she is asked to write yet he/she cannot use the language effectively. The only way to alter the attitude of these people is to educate them. This problem of illiteracy may not be prevalent in a school district where its students are considered to be motivated and capable, the problem can however be seen throughout the nation and thus illiteracy or the inability to use the language effectively will definitely cause one to dislike or fear writing.

Moreover, the educational system and its grading systems can be another cause to the students' fearful attitude towards writing. It is evident that children seem to be much more motivated than older students. This then causes one to wonder whether the students or the educational system is to blame. Indeed, somewhere during one's learning process, one loses the vigor and motivation either because of discouraging comments or grades. If one is told

that he/she is incapable of writing or receives an extremely embarrassing grade on his/her writing, it is no doubt that he will eventually lose faith. Writing becomes a threatening task and creates immense mental strain for the writer.

The fact that writing itself requires some effort to most students may be another cause as to why some students do not enjoy writing. In such cases, writing is considered to be work. In an educational system where the majority of the students lose their motivation day after day, it is apparent that without motivation, work, in this case writing, becomes a burden.

Therefore, writing, through an impartial segment of communication, is becoming less enjoyable as a result of both the educational system and the students. The only method to make writing more enjoyable is to correct both the educational system and hence the students can regain their confidence as well as motivation for writing.

Mid-range Achievement

In this essay the student is responding to a prompt inviting speculation about a fictional character's motivations. Though we might favor it initially, because the writer chooses an important text in world literature, and because it is well written sentence by sentence, it represents only marginal mid-range achievement because the writer does not engage explicitly in causal argument. The essay is certainly on topic—it identifies a work, a character, and a character trait that needs explaining—but it mainly describes Odysseus' actions and attributes them to pride, rather than probing the motivation of his pride. Reading it, we recognize that we are not in the presence of a logical, sequential, convincing causal argument. This essay demonstrates that the writing assessment system does not reward something that might be called "general good writing." It cannot because it is designed to assess thinking/writing achievement in specific, widely recognized writing situations. Depending on the prompt, *The Odyssey* might be a good choice for several writing situations: interpretation, evaluation, reflection, controversial issue, speculation, even report of information; but the thinking required, the use of the text, and the essay pattern would be sharply different in each of these writing situations.

A Proud Man of Ancient Greece

Many stories written in ancient Greece reflect upon the bold image of man. Men were so superior, they based their lives on pride. Many characters, such as Creon in Sophocles' Antigone, *made clear sacrifices just for selfish pride. Of all the men who have dedicated their lives to foolish pride, one man stands out above all the rest. Odysseus from the* Odyssey *by Homer is that man.*

Because Odysseus was a proud Greek, he had to deal with trouble for him and his soldiers. He defended his soldiers through many dangers and hardships which might have been avoided. In fact, the whole journey could have been prevented. His first act of pride happened at the Land of Lotus Eaters.

The ship landed on a shore of the most beautiful land man had ever seen. So beautiful was this land, not one of Odysseus' loyal men wanted to leave. Even Odysseus himself was captivated by this land, but his pride kept him from living forever in peace. He faced his reluctant soldiers to set sail to Athens.

Odysseus was one of the many characters of Greek plays that made sacrifices for pride. Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter so the Greeks could go to war with Troy. King Creon of Thebes sacrificed his niece just to gain loyalty of his people. Although one of Odysseus' objectives was to bring all of his men home, he sacrificed them all, so he could go back home to be King.

Odysseus showed typical Greek pride once he reached his home. His first action was to kill all of the suitors who had taken advantage of Penelope's stall of who would be her husband by living in her home. Killing all of the suitors may not have been the answer to Odysseus' problems but his pride believed it was the only answer.

Pride has been shown to cause many problems. For Odysseus and other characters in Greek stories, these problems were severe. It meant trouble, harm, or death for the character and those related to him. Pride is good for some people, but one who is too proud will find his life to have problems. One such life was that of Odysseus.

Low-range Achievement

This writer, too, is invited to speculate about a character's motives. If we assume the wino is a character in a work of literature—and most readers could not be certain—then this essay is at least on topic. We know what happened and there is even speculation about why it happened. The speculation is not developed, however.

What Happon!!!

A Wino came in and order 26c worth of food and then he ate it and after he wa done the manager asked him to pay the bill then he said he have no money then the manager jumped him. bit the crap out of him. there was someone sitting next to him

and he said leave him alone. I'll pay the 20c then the wino pulled himself up and said no need to pay I already did.

Why it happen

The reason why it happen is because the wino was hungry and he was so hungry he wasn't thinking straight.

Published Examples of Speculation About Causes and Effects

In the following article Robert Jastrow speculates about what caused human beings to become the brainiest of all creatures. He proposes a complex cause, resulting from influences of weather changes and migration, as well as development of food-making and language.

Man of Wisdom[1]

by Robert Jastrow

Starting about one million years ago, the fossil record shows an accelerating growth of the human brain. It expanded at first at the rate of one cubic inch of additional gray matter every hundred thousand years; then the growth rate doubled; it doubled again; and finally it doubled once more. Five hundred thousand years ago the rate of growth hit its peak. At that time the brain was expanding at a phenomenal rate of ten cubic inches every hundred thousand years. No other organ in the history of life is known to have grown as fast as this.

What pressures generated the explosive growth of the human brain? A change of climate that set in about two million years ago may supply part of the answer. At that time the world began its descent into a great Ice Age, the first to afflict the planet in hundreds of millions of years. The trend toward colder weather set in slowly at first, but after a million years patches of ice began to form in the north. The ice patches thickened into glaciers as more snow fell, and then the glaciers merged into great sheets of ice, as much as two miles thick. When the ice sheets reached their maximum extent, they covered two-thirds of the North American continent, all of Britain and a large part of Europe. Many mountain ranges were buried entirely. So much water was locked up on the land in the form of ice that the level of the earth's oceans dropped by three hundred feet.

These events coincided precisely with the period of most rapid expansion of the human brain. Is the coincidence significant, or is it happenstance?

The story of human migrations in the last million years provides a clue to the answer. At the beginning of the Ice Age Homo lived near the equator, where the climate was mild and pleasant. Later he moved northward. From his birthplace in Africa he migrated up across the Arabian peninsula and then turned to the north and west into Europe, as well as eastward into Asia.

When these early migrations took place, the ice was still confined to the lands in the far north; but 8 hundred thousand years ago, when man was already established in the temperate latitudes, the ice moved southward until it covered large parts of Europe and Asia. Now, for the first time, man encountered the bone-chilling blasts of freezing winds that blew off the cakes of ice to the north. The climate in southern Europe had a Siberian harshness then, and summers were nearly as cold as European winters are today.

In those difficult times, the traits of resourcefulness and ingenuity must have been of premium value. Which individual first thought of stripping the pelt from the slaughtered beast to wrap around his shivering limbs? Only by such inventive flights of the imagination could the naked animal survive a harsh climate. In every generation, the individuals endowed with the attributes of strength, courage, and improvisation were the ones more likely to survive the rigors of the Ice Age; those who were less resourceful, and lacked the vision of their fellows, fell victims to the climate and their numbers were reduced.

The Ice Age winter was the most devastating challenge that Homo had ever faced. He was naked and defenseless against the cold, as the little mammals had been defenseless against the dinosaurs one hundred million years ago. Vulnerable to the pressures of a hostile world, both animals were forced to live by their wits; and both became, in their time, the brainiest animals of the day.

The tool-making industry of early man also stimulated the growth of the brain. The possession of a good brain had been one of the factors that enabled Homo to make tools at the start. But the use of tools became, in turn, a driving force toward the evolution of an even better brain. The characteristics of good memory, foresight, and innovativeness that were needed for tool-making varied in strength from one individual to another. Those who possessed them in the greatest degree were the practical heroes of their day; they were likely to survive and prosper, while the individuals who lacked them were more likely to succumb to the pressures of the environment. Again these circumstances pruned the human stock, expanding the centers of the brain in which past experiences were recorded, future actions were contemplated, and new ideas were conceived. As a result, from generation to generation the brain grew larger.

[1] Robert Jastrow, "Man of Wisdom," in *Until The Sun Dies*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977, pp. 124–128.

The evolution of speech may have been the most important factor of all. When early man mastered the loom of language, his progress accelerated dramatically. Through the spoken word a new invention of tool-making, for example, could be communicated to everyone; in this way the innovativeness of the individual enhanced the survival prospects of his fellows, and the creative strength of one became the strength of all. More important, through language the ideas of one generation could be passed on to the next, so that each generation inherited not only the genes of its ancestors but also their collective wisdom, transmitted through the magic of speech.

A million years ago, when this magic was not yet perfected, and language was a cruder art, those bands of men who possessed the new gift in the highest degree were strongly favored in the struggle for existence. But the fabric of speech is woven out of many threads. The physical attributes of a voice box, lips, and tongue were among the necessary traits; but a good brain was also essential, to frame an abstract thought or represent an object by a word.

Now the law of the survival of the fittest began to work on the population of early men. Steadily, the physical apparatus for speech improved. At the same time, the centers of the brain devoted to speech grew in size and complexity, and in the course of many generations the whole brain grew with them. Once more, as with the use of tools, reciprocal forces came into play in which speech stimulated better brains, and brains improved the art of speech, and the curve of brain growth spiraled upward.

Which factor played the most important role in the evolution of human intelligence? Was it the pressure of the Ice Age climate? Or tools? Or language? No one can tell; all worked together, through Darwin's law of natural selection, to produce the dramatic increase in the size of the brain that has been recorded in the fossil record in the last million years. The brain reached its present size about one hundred thousand years ago, and its growth ceased. Man's body had been shaped into its modern form several hundred thousand years before that. Now brain and body were complete. Together they made a new and marvelous creature, charged with power, intelligence, and creative energy. His wits had been honed by the fight against hunger, cold, and the natural enemy; his form had been molded in the crucible of adversity. In the annals of anthropology his arrival is celebrated by a change in name, from *Homo erectus*—the Man who stands erect—to *Homo sapiens*—the Man of wisdom.

The story of man's creation nears an end. In the beginning there was light; then a dark cloud appeared, and made the sun and earth. The earth grew warmer; its body exhaled moisture and gases; water collected on the surface; soon the first molecules struggled across the threshold of life. Some survived; others perished; and the law of Darwin began its work. The pressures of the environment acted ceaselessly, and the forms of life improved.

The changes were imperceptible from one generation to the next. No creature was aware of its role in the large drama; all felt only the pleasure and pain of existence; and life and death were devoid of a greater meaning.

But to the human observer, looking back on the history of life from the perspective of many eons, a meaning becomes evident. He sees that through the struggle against the forces of adversity, each generation molds the shapes of its descendants. Adversity and struggle lie at the root of evolutionary progress. Without adversity there is no pressure; without pressure there is no change.

These circumstances, so painful to the individual, create the great currents that carry life forward from the simple to the complex. Finally, man stands on the earth, more perfect than any other. Intelligent, self-aware, he alone among all creatures has the curiosity to ask: How did I come into being? What forces have created me? And, guided by his scientific knowledge, he comes to the realization that he was created by all who came before him, through their struggle against adversity.

This next article, from *National Geographic*, speculates about the effects of population growth on the world's supply of natural resources. The author, Paul Ehrlich, of Stanford University, proposes his theory that it doesn't matter so much how many people inhabit the earth. What matters more is how the life-style of these people affects the ecosystems. It is an interesting discussion of a scientific/geographic issue, using economic terms. As such, it could be used in a variety of high school classrooms.

Population, Plenty, and Poverty[2]

by Paul Ehrlich

When the National Geographic Society was founded in 1888, a billion and a half people inhabited the earth. Now the population exceeds five billion and is growing fast—by some 90 million in 1988. In essence the world must accommodate a new population roughly equivalent to that of the United States and Canada every three years. Even though the rate of growth has begun to decline, most demographers believe population size will still pass 8 billion during the next 50 years.

In a sense today's five billion people represent a triumph of our species. By all measures we have

[2]Paul Ehrlich, "Population, Plenty, and Poverty," in *National Geographic*, Vol. 174 (December, 1988), 914.

become the dominant animal on the planet. Through a series of technological innovations that include farming, sanitation, and the control of many epidemic diseases, we have found ways to reduce the rate at which we die, creating a population explosion. Biologically this is the very definition of success.

But there is a dark side to our triumph. We live on a finite planet, and yet we act as if its resources were infinite. Because of overpopulation and overconsumption, humanity is incapable of supporting itself on its "income," the energy arriving continuously from the sun. Instead Homo sapiens is consuming its "capital," a onetime bonanza of nonrenewable fossil fuels and other mineral resources that formed over eons and are now being destroyed and dispersed in decades. We are doing the same with vital resources not usually thought of as being non-renewable: deep, fertile agricultural soils, groundwater, and biodiversity—the untold millions of other species that share earth with us.

The mechanisms that supply us with income are ecosystems—plants, animals, and microorganisms interacting with each other and their physical environments. The energy that flows through these ecosystems and the oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, and other materials they recycle are the essence of the life-support system within which five billion people are inextricably embedded.

Ecosystems supply civilization with public services both free and irreplaceable. They include regulation of climate and the makeup of the atmosphere, generation and maintenance of soils, control of potential crop pests and carriers of human diseases, pollination of many crops, and provision of food from the sea. Ecosystems supply the nutrients without which we could not survive, and in the process they dispose of our wastes.

The vast array of organisms that ecosystems support can be thought of as a giant genetic library. Humanity has already withdrawn from that library the very basis of its civilization in the form of crops, domestic animals, industrial materials, and medicines. And its potential has barely been scratched.

Understanding ecosystems and how civilization is living on capital provides the appropriate context for analyzing the population problem. It immediately exposes the myth that the impact of the population explosion stems primarily from poor people in other countries who do not know enough to limit their reproduction. Numbers *per se* are not the measure of overpopulation; instead it is the impact of people on ecosystems and nonrenewable resources. While developing countries severely tax their environments, clearly the populations of rich countries leave a vastly disproportionate mark on the planet.

For example, tropical forests are known to be the major reservoirs of biodiversity of species that can supply humanity with many direct benefits and are working parts of ecosystems. The clearing of tropical forests is usually an attempt (often unsuccessful) to provide farms for rapidly growing populations of poor people. But it also results from the *affluence* of people in rich countries. Central American forests are destroyed in part for pastureland to make pet food and convenience food in the United States slightly cheaper; in Papua New Guinea forests are destroyed to supply cardboard packaging for Japanese electronic products. Thus a rich person thousands of miles away may cause more tropical forest destruction than a poor person living within the forest itself.

The connection of population growth in wealthy nations to global environmental problems can most readily be seen in the rise in atmospheric levels of the gases carbon dioxide and methane. These "greenhouse" gases trap heat near earth's surface and thus alter the climate. Major sources of increased CO_2 are the burning of fossil fuels—clearly related to affluence—and the destruction of forests. Major sources of methane include not only intensive wetland cultivation of rice but also large populations of cattle, whose digestive tracts give off methane at both ends.

In short, while rapid population growth in poor countries impedes the escape from poverty and often leads to local environmental deterioration, overpopulation and resource consumption in rich nations threatens earth's capacity to sustain us all.

Readings in Speculation About Causes and Effects

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Tobias, Shelia. "Who's Afraid of Math, and Why?" *Overcoming Math Anxiety*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978.

Springboards for speculation

Teenagers agonize over why people act the way they do. They ask why parents treat them in certain ways, why families break apart, why their friends contemplate suicide or abuse drugs and alcohol, and so forth. The following titles, loosely classified, lend themselves to an analysis of causes of human behavior:

Alcoholism: Why do they start?

Wagner, Robin S., and Sarah T. Wagner. *Portrait of a Teenage Alcoholic*. (Out of print.)

Depression and other mental illnesses: Why do they feel this way?

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *The Yellow Wallpaper*. New York: Feminist Press, 1973.
Greenberg, Joanne. *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. New York: New American Library, 1989.
The Journals of Sylvia Plath. Edited by Ted Hughes and Frances McCullough. New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1983.
McKnew, Donald H., and others. *Why Isn't Johnny Crying? Coping with Depression in Children*. New York: Norton, 1983.
Neufeld, John. *Lisa, Bright and Dark*. New York: New American Library, 1970.
Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1984.
Salinger, J.D. *Franny and Zooey*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1984.

Drug abuse: How does it start?

Go Ask Alice. New York: Avon Books, 1982.

Ethnic and social differences: Why should it make a difference?

Bradford, Richard. *Red Sky at Morning*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc, 1986.
Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1968.
Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1982.

Interpersonal relations: Why do we play those games?

Berne, Eric. *The Games People Play*. New York: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, Inc., 1978.

Loneliness: Why do we feel this way?

Anderson, Sherwood. *Winesburg, Ohio*. New York: Penguin Books USA, Inc., 1988.
McCullers, Carson. *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*. New York: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, Inc., 1970.

Suicide: What causes it and how does it affect others?

Alvarez, A. *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1972.
Guest, Judith. *Ordinary People*. New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1982.
Johnston, Jerry. *Why Suicide?* New York: Oliver-Nelson, 1987.
Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. New York: Penguin Books USA, Inc., 1976.
Plath, Sylvia. *The Bell Jar*. New York: Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, Inc., 1975.

High School Rhetorical Effectiveness Scoring Guide

Speculation About Causes and Effects

Prompts for speculation require writers to present one of two kinds of speculative argument:

1. Writers speculate or conjecture about the *causes* of a given situation, event, or trend.

   – or –

2. Writers speculate or predict possible *effects* (outcomes or consequences) of a given event or phenomenon.

These requirements make speculation essentially persuasive, requiring systematically developed arguments carefully grounded in a precisely defined situation. Students use "what if" patterns of thinking to propose causes or to predict consequences, and then they attempt to convince readers to take seriously their proposed causes and effects.

They elaborate on these causes and effects, developing and linking them to convince the reader of the plausibility of the argument.

While the *rhetorical* aspect of the assessment focuses on the distinctive features of writing types, the *effectiveness* aspect guides us to look carefully at the more comprehensive features of coherence and style. Coherence, a sense of organization, flow, and focus, is essential to all good writing. The coherent essay has a clear direction, each section flowing naturally from the preceding one. Coherence is demonstrated to readers through emphasis, organization, and repetition achieved through recurrences of language, syntax, and ideas. Style, for the purposes of this assessment, is observable in two written language features: (1) *sentence control* and (2) *word choice* or *diction*. In assessment of the effectiveness of style, the primary considerations are *appropriateness*, *precision*, and *control*.

Speculation is a complex type of writing, potentially involving imaginative, inventive argument developed by such strategies as definition, description, narration, and explanation. The essay may present a factual assessment arising from knowledge of the real world; or it may present a fanciful guess about a fantastic situation. In either case, the writer's success depends on inventing plausible causes and effects and arguing them both imaginatively and logically. The best essays will exhibit and develop internal logic and consistency that are directly suited to the situation, whether "real world" or fantasy.

Score Point 6 – Exceptional Achievement

A six-point essay engages the reader immediately. It seems purposeful. The writer seems aware of readers' questions and needs throughout the essay. The essay seems to be not just written but written to particular readers. The writer convinces the readers of the plausibility of the speculation.

A six-point essay demonstrates qualities all readers admire: conviction, enthusiasm, freshness. These essays may use an unconventional rhetorical approach. A six-point essay may take chances and succeed.

Presenting the Situation. The six-point essay writer clearly defines, identifies, or describes the situation to be speculated about. Though it does not dominate the essay at the expense of speculation, the situation is nevertheless presented fully and precisely. The writer limits the occasion appropriately, focusing reader attention on just those aspects of the situation that the writer will speculate about. Although this information usually comes at the beginning of the essay, some writers may devise other ways of revealing the situation. Whether it arises from fact or from fantasy, the presentation of the situation grounds and focuses the entire essay.

Writers of six-point essays may describe or detail the situation that is established in the prompt, or they might create the situation by using narrative or anecdotal techniques. In either case, they will use concrete language, rich in sensory detail.

The writer of the six-point essay acknowledges readers' concerns. For real-world situa-

tions, the writer of the six-point essay acknowledges the reader's experience or familiarity with a situation and, using narrative or descriptive strategies, builds on this awareness to focus reader attention on a comparable situation. For fantasy situations, the writer acknowledges reader concerns and questions about the occasion and uses narrative or descriptive techniques to create a believable, if fanciful, situation.

Whether the essay arises from a factual assessment of a real situation or from a fanciful guess about a fanciful situation, the writer consistently demonstrates broad knowledge and clear understanding of the situation. In this way the writer establishes authority.

Logic and Relevance of Causes and Effects. In the six-point essay, the proposed causes and effects are clearly related to the particular situation that the writer has defined. Writers use imaginative, inventive argument to convince the reader of the logic of their speculations. The best writers are clearly considering possibilities and are seeing multiple perspectives. They are stretching their imaginations to follow their ideas as far as they can; and they are maintaining focus by establishing and continually developing the close relationship between the particular situation and the effects that might arise from it.

Because speculation is essentially a persuasive type of writing, the best writers will be continually aware of readers' needs. They might refer to the readers directly, trying to enlist their support; or they might directly acknowledge the readers' possible questions or objections to postulated speculations. Throughout the essay, the writers of the six-point essays seem to understand fully that particular readers must be convinced that their speculations are plausible and are appropriate to the situation they have defined.

In proposing appropriate causes and effects, writers may employ some of the following strategies:

- Use "what if" patterns of thinking to pose causes and effects and to show the relationship between these conjectures and the situation.
- Build a succession of causes and effects, each changing the complexion of the whole.
- Show a direct and logical connection between the speculated cause or effect and the situation: how the causes logically create the situation or how the effects arise as a natural consequence of it.
- Control organizational sequences, such as the following: movement from least to most important cause or effect; from small to large issues; from concrete to abstract; from personal to societal causes and effects.

The writer of the six-point essay establishes, maintains, and develops a plausible relationship between the situation and each of the proposed causes and effects. The speculation is linked naturally to the situation. Transitions are of particular importance in these essays, keeping the reader grounded both in the relationship between the situation and the proposed causes and effects and in the logical development and progression of the speculation itself. Through these transitions the writer carries the reader along with the methodical development of the argument. Throughout the essay, the six-point essay writer weaves together facts, opinions, and projections to create and develop convincing reasons for the proposed speculations.

An occasional writer may present only a narrative (a story scenario) that is so fully developed and effective that readers are convinced of the logic and relevance of the argument through the narrative's implications.

Elaboration of Argument. The six-point essay provides substantial elaboration, convincing the reader that the writer's conjectures are valid for the situation. These writers elaborate their speculated causes and effects with carefully chosen evidence that is logically and fully developed. Such evidence is chosen because it is relevant and convincing. It is developed fully with precise, explicit detail to convince the reader of both the logic and the authenticity of the proposed cause or effect.

Some strategies writers may use to develop their arguments are the following:

- Cite facts, opinions, projections, and personal experiences or observations (anecdotes) to explain or validate a cause or an effect.
- Elaborate on possibilities arising from proposed causes and effects, showing possible "domino effects" that might determine the direction of a developing situation.
- Give specific examples of comparable causes and effects that have arisen in analogous situations.

Writers may mention several possible causes and effects, developing and linking them; or they may mention only one, building it fully and examining it closely from a variety of perspectives. In any event, the six-point essay writer must make a full and convincing argument for at least one postulated cause or effect.

Score Point 5 – Commendable Achievement

Presenting the Situation. As in the six-point essay, the situation is clearly defined but with less elaboration. The situation does not dominate the essay at the expense of speculation. The writer of the five-point essay relies on a narrower range of strategies for presenting the situation. The five-point essay writer will limit and focus the occasion, though possibly with less panache than the six-point writer. The language will lack only the vividness and impact of the six-point essay. In the five-point essay as in the six-point essay, the writer's knowledge and understanding of the situation is clear throughout, and a sense of confidence and authority is maintained.

Logic and Relevance of Causes and Effects. As in the six-point essay, the writer proposes causes and effects that are linked naturally to the defined situation. The writer conjectures persuasively for possible, probable, or plausible causes and effects. The speculations are serious and logical, lacking only the freshness and imagination that is characteristic of the six-point essay. The writer reaches beyond obvious statements about possible causes and effects to speculations that are not entirely predictable.

The writer of the five-point essay has a consistent awareness of audience and keeps the reader grounded in both the situation and the speculations. The five-point essay reveals direction and purpose and develops the relationship between the occasion and the speculations, though the writer may not maintain focus on this relationship as consistently as in the six-point paper. The five-point paper may lack the clarity of focus, the continuity, or the growing insight and fullness of the six-point essay. The speculations will be insightful but not as probing as in a six-point essay.

Elaboration of Argument. As in the six-point essay, the writer engages in extended, thoughtful speculation, using effective arguments to convince the reader of the logic and validity of the speculations. The writer chooses evidence that is relevant and convincing; the supporting evidence will be more predictable than in the six-point essay. The writer may mention several possible causes and effects or may concentrate only on one; however, the supporting details, though relevant and convincing, will not be as richly developed.

Score Point 4 – Adequate Achievement

Presenting the Situation. The writer of the four-point essay presents the situation but with less assuredness than is evidenced in five- or six-point papers. It may not be as clearly focused, or it may lack the detail or specificity of the five- or six-point essays. The writer may, for instance, simply paraphrase the prompt rather than define a focused situation linked to it. On the other hand, the situation may tend to dominate the four-point essay, though these writers do offer some explicit speculation. The presentation of the situation will be adequate to orient readers to the proposed causes and effects. Although the language in the four-point essay is generally appropriate, it may be somewhat conventional and predictable.

Logic and Relevance of Causes and Effects. The writer of the four-point essay establishes a connection between the situation and the postulated causes and effects, but may not maintain this connection as explicitly or effectively as in the five- and six-point essays. The proposed causes and effects may be logical but predictable. They will arise from or be appropriate to the situation; but they may seem tangential, not grounded as firmly in the situation. Acknowledgment of readers is not as evident as the five- and six-point essays, and the speculations may be disconnected. A four-point essay may be characterized by thoughtfulness rather than inventiveness.

Elaboration of Argument. The writer of the four-point essay offers less persuasive evidence for the validity of the proposed causes and effects. The essay exhibits some internal logic and an overall sense of organization; but it may not show a consistent relationship between the situation and the effects or causes. There may be some irrelevant details. The essay shows a sustained control of sentence structures but may have less variety than the five- and six-point essays. The writer exhibits both an understanding of the situation and an exploration of possible causes and effects; but the development and ex-

planations of the speculations may seem somewhat thin.

Score Point 3 – Some Evidence of Achievement

Presenting the Situation. The writer of a three-point essay presents a situation, but it may either be brief or dominate the essay. There is limited use of strategies characterized by commonplace language. The writer may simply paraphrase the prompt rather than define the situation. The writer may not clearly establish the boundaries of the situation or may not seem to fully understand it. The writer may not acknowledge readers.

Logic and Relevance of Causes and Effects. Though the speculations in the three-point essay are at least tangentially relevant, the writer may tend to list a series of causes and effects rather than develop them or ground them in the situation. On the other hand, there may be only one minimally developed cause or effect mentioned. These essays may have a meandering quality rather than the purposeful, logical movement of a persuasive argument. The speculations may seem obvious, superficial, or predictable. There may appear to be little conscious awareness of the reader and little effort to convince a reader by developing a logical cause-effect relationship.

Elaboration of Argument. Elaboration in the three-point essay is limited, perhaps to a brief explanation of one cause or effect or to a listing of several, with minimal development. These essays lack consistency in development of detail. Though they may provide rudimentary connections between the situation and the speculations, the sequence and organizational pattern may be unclear. The word choice is usually appropriate to the content; however, the writer may rely on general rather than specific language.

The essay may seem generally competent and the speculations may be interesting; but the writer has not yet learned that speculation is persuasive and requires systematically *developed* arguments carefully grounded in a precisely defined situation.

Score Point 2 – Little Evidence of Achievement

Presenting the Occasion. The writer of a two-point essay exhibits only minimal understanding of the situation. These essays may begin abruptly. The writer may attempt to construct a situation, but because of omissions, erratic jumps in time or place, or breakdowns in cohesion, will not establish focus. In some two-point essays, the situation will dominate the essay. Other two-point essays will have no occasion, beginning abruptly with a list of causes and effects.

Logic and Relevance of Causes and Effects. If there is a situation, the speculations may be either brief or meandering and unfocused. There is little connection between the situation and the speculations, and little evidence of any logical organization. Some of the proposed causes or effects may seem illogical or unrelated to the situation.

Elaboration of Argument. There is little elaboration in the two-point essay, often merely listing. Some details may be irrelevant and unconnected to either the situation or the speculations. These essays may tend to be quite brief, as there usually is little development either of the situation or of the causes and effects; or they may be extended generalized ramblings with little grounding at all in either a situation or in "what if" conjecturing. The two-point essay may merely list causes and effects without support or argument. The two-point essay contains little or no argument or effort to persuade the reader.

Score Point 1 – Minimal Evidence of Achievement

Presenting the Situation. If there is a situation, it is very brief and devoid of specificity or concreteness. The one-point essay may point vaguely to a situation without focusing or establishing its boundaries.

Logic and Relevance of Causes and Effects. If there are speculations, they are brief and superficial attempts at prediction rather than considered explorations of possibilities. There is no evidence of a logical connection between the situation and the causes and effects. The proposed causes and effects, if any, may be difficult to identify or understand.

Elaboration of Argument. There is little or no elaboration of either the situation or of the causes and effects. Speculations, if presented at all, are not argued. There are frequent lapses in sentence sense, resulting in confusion, and the essay relies

on a limited use of common words, exhibiting a meager range of word choice. There is rarely any sense of the reader. The writer of the one-point essay is usually brief and is often not coherent.

Unscorable – Inappropriate Response

Off topic. No response. Written in a foreign language.

Students with Special Needs

California's assessment program historically has tested all students except those enrolled in special day classes or centers or who are identified as non-English speaking (NES). Strictly defined, that means that special education students officially participating in regular classes and counted for enrollment in the grade level tested are to participate in the statewide testing program, including students in pull-out-type programs such as the Resource Specialist Program (RSP).

Language classifications used by the state assessment fall into four categories: English only; fluent-English speaking (FES); limited-English proficient (LEP); and non-English speaking (NES). Only the last category (NES) is exempt from state testing; that holds true for the writing assessment.

Students with learning problems or language limitations may need special assistance as they develop skills targeted in the assessment of writing. To help them become successful writers, teachers may need to modify classroom assignments suggested in the writing guides, clarify process descriptions, or increase practice sessions. The "Students with Special Needs" section is intended to assist teachers and others responsible for this sometimes difficult but important task.

Writing in a New Language

Students in language acquisition programs, such as bilingual education and English-as-a-second language (ESL), progress through stages of development that are similar to but not exactly like those of native English-speaking students. At the beginning their understanding of English may be limited to associations with firsthand experience. In time they begin to create a simple English structure necessary for inclusion in school activities or communicating basic needs. Later, they use English to interact meaningfully with others, and they are able to use language for making generalizations and for analyzing situations and textbooks. Finally, the ability to use English for clarifying concepts and abstract problem solving evolves.

The communicative competence of NES or LEP students in English improves as they strive to understand the messages of others and actively create their own in increasingly more complex situations. Experience shows that exposure to comprehensible English and practice in negotiating meaning through teacher encouragement, supportive risk taking, and guidance can improve language ability.

NES or LEP students will vary in their ability to use standard American edited English structures and forms in constructing their messages. The language used by these students in their messages is not incorrect. It is not a random selection of words, sentence structures, or imperfect attempts at adult English. The language is legitimate and follows a coherent code or rules consistent with the student's present proficiency level. We need to remember that students may be doing as well as their prevailing English abilities permit. ESL research tells us that improvement in grammar and usage is facilitated not by isolated study as provided in many workbook exercises or pattern drills. It occurs through active attempts to generate the language needed to communicate responses to meaningful situations.

Writing assignments can provide the basis for needed experimentations with communication. The assignments set up situations that have to be understood by students and, most importantly, are tied to their experience. Students are asked to construct written responses that communicate ideas, information, opinions, images, and so forth to readers. This recorded language then can be examined, adjusted, revised, expanded, or otherwise changed to reflect an improvement in written communication. For an LEP student, this mediation can facilitate the development of English writing abilities. In time and as a result of teacher guidance, the ability to communicate in English will change, improve, and become more fluid.

Teaching LEP Students to Write

The following suggestions can make writing experiences positive for both the teacher and students with limited-English proficiency:

1. Make the writing situation understandable.

   - Help students read the writing prompt.
     - Introduce the assignments orally.
     - Use visuals when possible.
     - Allow students to refer to their native language and English dictionaries when unclear about intent or meaning of unfamiliar terms. (See section on reading a writing prompt.)
   - Simplify the language of the writing assignment when necessary and avoid the following:
     - Uncommon terminology
     - Idiomatic expressions or figurative language
     - Conceptually dense sentences
     - Distant or ambiguous pronoun reference
     - Difficult syntactic structures, such as conditionals and the passive voice
     - Ambiguous statements or unclear directives
     - Vocabulary with double meanings
   - Determine whether the student has sufficient background knowledge to comprehend the topic of the assignment. Use discovery questions and strategies such as the following to help students recall prior knowledge and orient their thinking:
     - What do you know about. . . ?
     - Have you ever . . . (done anything like this) before?
     - Have you ever read about something like this?
     - This topic is like . . . (something previously experienced or studied).
     - What do you think about . . . ? What is your opinion?
     - Imagine yourself in this situation. Where would you be? Who would be with you? What would you be doing? What results or outcomes would be expected?

     If the student is unable to respond to these probes, the topic may not be well enough understood to serve as the subject for a writing assignment. When this happens, teachers need either to provide experiences necessary for a response or change the subject of the writing assignment to one that serves the same purpose but that is more accessible.
   - Examine both published and student writings that exemplify the type of writing you are teaching to ensure the following:
     - The example is understandable (readable but not watered down or devoid of content).
     - Characteristics of a type of discourse are clear to the student.
     - Individual or pairs of students have opportunities to discuss and identify the rhetorical features of an example of writing.
   - Focus on the meaningful use of English. Do not focus unnecessary attention, time, and effort on
     - Spelling
     - Syntactic errors
     - Grammar instruction
     - Rules of punctuation
   - Preview the lesson in the student's native language in certain situations to help trigger recall of experience or knowledge or for better understanding of the intent of a lesson. This procedure should be used sparingly and only when necessary to help students comprehend a lesson or get involved in it.

2. Guide students through a response to a writing assignment.

   - Use the writing assignments from the writing guides that have prewriting assistance built into them. Follow their suggestions for prewriting.
   - Use prewriting discussions to help students recall prior knowledge related to the topic, clarify the intent of writing exercises, and examine models of specific discourse.
   - Teach the three strategies of "brainstorming" (useful in generating content), "clustering" (helpful in interpreting this content), and "mapping" (which helps organize ideas) to LEP students. Allow students to compose orally before developing their first written draft.
   - Have students write out complete first drafts of their ideas. Expect first written drafts to reflect the students' current level of language functioning.
   - Guide students through the Response Guide (sometimes called Revision Guide or Student Workshop) as they review their own first drafts and those of others. They should be allowed to review the writing of more proficient writers and to receive responses from them about their own papers. Be specific in pointing out the successful incorpo-

ration of characteristics of specific kinds of writing by students.
- Be selective during editing to choose the convention or mechanical problem that most interferes with communication. Focus on the identification and correction of one major editing concern at a time. Do not attempt to focus on all concerns within one assignment.
- Carefully monitor LEP students at each step of the process. Make sure that they understand the reason for certain procedures and are aware of the outcomes expected.

3. Be cognizant of students' needs during the writing process.

   - Be patient. Fewer assignments, carefully planned from prewriting through revision, are more productive than many done poorly.
   - Provide repeated experiences with the same type of discourse. One experience may not be sufficient for the student to accomplish independence.
   - Encourage students to write in their native language. The understanding that may result will conceptually guide a similar composing experience in English. Students who are skillful writers in their native language can be expected to acquire English composing skills more easily than others who do not read or write in their native language.
   - Avoid spending too much time having students study grammar, spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, and so forth in isolation. This time is better spent helping students apply such information in the course of clarifying the message they are writing.
   - Expect gradual improvement, not immediate perfection, to result from this practice. Only after much practice, many opportunities to use English meaningfully, and exposure to an accepting environment will proficiency come.
   - Respect the student's current level of ability to communicate in English.

4. Above all, provide assistance and guidance directed toward composing activities.
   - Focus on meaningful communication.
   - Help students generate ideas to be expressed, experiment with present language to communicate to an identified audience, and learn from feedback how to make the written message clearer.
   - Help LEP students communicate as well as they can in each writing assignment.
   - Be realistic with expectations and allow the students time to improve gradually in the ability to compose thoughts and to communicate them in English.

Helping the Less-prepared Student

Students in remedial or other special assistance programs are by definition atypical. They may have disrupted educational histories, an insufficient knowledge base, slower learning rates, lower cognitive abilities, or (for some other reason) a pattern of limited academic success. Compared with higher achieving students, they often have shorter attention spans, are less willing to tackle new assignments, are more dependent on teachers for guidance and instruction, are slower to catch on to or comprehend lessons, and will require more practice before independence is possible. Yet, while not immediately proficient, once a procedure is learned, these students tend to be more dependent on it than would be true of their more capable peers. The "power" paragraph/essay is one such example. When overtaught, this formula-type procedure results in the belief by many less prepared students that all writing is composed in this fashion. They tend to use the technique as it is practiced and are frequently unable to reinterpret this formula when confronted with new but related situations that do not warrant its application.

Teachers have found that these students often need more concrete examples than do their peers, longer meditation time before tackling assignments, more clarity provided with assignments, and more guidance through these tasks. These students also have been found to need additional trial runs to learn strategies and may rely on visual or verbal reminders of procedures throughout lessons. With so many circumstances and learning variables influencing writing instruction, it is no wonder that so many of the less able or prepared students need special assistance and guidance to learn to manage each type of writing.

Working with Remedial or Other Writers Needing Special Assistance

The suggestions included here can help students approach the writing experience with increased comfort and confidence.

1. Ease into instruction.

Students may hesitate in responding to a new writing assignment and need to be acquainted with the type of writing you will be teaching them. During this awareness time, provide concrete reference to the characteristics of a type of writing, spend time reading model essays, and discuss evaluation criteria. A process that emphasizes multiple examples and explanations leads to greater student control and independence. Familiarize students with a new type of writing by using the following strategies that are described in the writing guides:

- Introduce each new type of writing by discussing the *importance* of that type of thinking and composing experience. Help students realize how they will be empowered by this type of writing.
- Enumerate the *characteristics* of the type of writing. Illustrate them through a reading and discussion of an example of a published writing.
- Familiarize the students with the characteristics of that type of writing by having them read and discuss an appropriate exemplary student essay. The student response guide section in each writing guide is useful in guiding this discussion.

2. Help students experience successful completion.

Students may need help to experience the successful completion of writing assignments from prewriting to drafting, sharing, revising, and editing. Allow time for instruction so that students thoroughly understand what is expected of them in each step of the assignment. They need to be guided through practice of each step of the writing process before mastery and independence can be expected, and this takes time. Care must be taken to ensure that these students understand completely what is expected of them and are guided through their first attempts. Students must be provided with repeated experiences to ensure competence with a new type of writing before they move on to another assignment. In time and through experience, students will begin to feel comfortable enough to become more and more independent with new writing challenges.

Teachers can help students successfully work through writing assignments by incorporating the following strategies:

- Clarify the requirements of the prompt. Explain or clarify any terminology that may be new or difficult for the students .
- Guide students through each step of the writing process:

Prewriting
- Ask students to list potential topics.
- Discuss possible topics with the teacher or peers.
- Decide on one topic.
- Discuss the intent of the assignment.
- Recall information to answer specifics of the prompt.
- Use "brainstorming," "clustering," and "mapping" to determine the content and general structure or organization of the writing.

Drafting
- Have students write a complete first draft, not to be graded but to be examined and improved in subsequent rewrites.

Sharing
- Have students share the first draft with peers or the teacher, using a student response guide section in each writing guide to provide suggestions for improvement.

Revision
- Have students rewrite the draft and incorporate suggestions regarding clarity, organization, content changes, and audience considerations. (Sharing and revision steps may be repeated several times.)

Editing
- Have students check sentences for corrections and grammar and conventions. This step should not be overemphasized.

3. Be judicious in providing editing feedback to students.

Isolated instruction that focuses on the formal study of English grammar and usage (seen in language arts grammar series) has been found to be too abstract and remote for application by students. Help with usage can be provided in the editing stage of the writing process and then only for the problems that most interfere with the intended communication. Selective responses that help students effect greater precision in their communication should occur not away from the students but in consultation with them.

4. Remember that success breeds success.

Nothing motivates better than progress and a sense of accomplishment associated with the writing assignment. Success can help build pride in a student as well as indicate the adequacy of teacher-provided instruction and guidance.

Dialects

Everyone who speaks English does so in a dialect of English. Similarly, everyone who writes English selects terminology, jargon, and expressions that represent dialect variation. Teachers with their specialized "educationese," radio announcers with speech tones reflecting the music they play, CB users with their colorful figurative expressions, farmers with their regionalized idiomatic expressions, teenage suburbanites with their specialized jargon, and others with their unique variety of language, all speak or write English that helps them to communicate with others who share the same language code. This language determination can indicate membership in a group as well as potentially exclude others from participation. Dialects provide speakers and writers with a shorthand method of communicating with individuals or groups sharing a similar cultural and linguistic experience. Elaboration of topics or explanations are not necessary when the language is understood and considered acceptable in a communicative situation.

Dialects of English are distinguished by differences in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, idiomatic expression, and use of figurative language. They are embedded in tradition, systematic, rule-governed, and often regionalized, and they help a group of individuals communicate. As a rule dialects of English are largely mutually understandable and have more common concepts than identified differences. Common differences that mark idiomatic and regional expression frequently involve the use of some verb tenses and pronouns in a manner somewhat distinct from the standard literary language or speech pattern commonly called standard American English.

Standard American English is that English understood, written, and spoken by the largest number of Americans. Standard American English is considered by some as the most prestigious of the American English dialects. It is that sound of English that is least regionally identified. It includes those structures of grammar that are clearest to the largest audience. It includes vocabulary that is most commonly understood. Many speakers and writers of English possess elements of English that approach standard English, but at times these speakers and writers also communicate in ways that could be viewed as nonstandard. For example, the formal English employed in a business letter is expected to be different from that used in a friendly letter. English produced by an individual varies from one audience to another, from topic to topic, and from situation to situation. This is true of the most flexible of English users.

Most linguists and educators agree that no one dialect of English can or perhaps should be identified as the only variety acceptable. All dialects of English serve a function, are considered appropriate under some circumstances, follow definite and determinable rules, and help the speaker and writer communicate to some degree with particular audiences. At times use of an identifiable nonstandard English dialect in writing helps provide a historical and geographical marker. At other times it marks political or social identities. Occasionally, such language is used to demonstrate closeness to or familiarity with the intended reader. In some cases it is used to set the author apart from the reader. While use of a nonstandard written dialect of English is not in itself incorrect, it is generally acknowledged that some dialect varieties are more appropriate than are others with some audiences and in certain situations. Most writers can identify times when a distinct type of oral or written English is not only expected but required. Even formal English, considered most standard, would be unsuitable in some contexts.

For clarity in writing, it is commonly expected that the author selects the variety of English that best communicates an intended message to an identified audience. If the writing is to be read by a large audience, it is expected that the most common terminology, structure and syntax, pronoun preference, and so forth be selected to

avoid confusion and misunderstanding. When the writing is intended for a specific reader, a more specialized and perhaps restricted language may be appropriate. For example, teachers show that they understand this distinction when they allow notes that students write for themselves after observing an event to be different from that writing expected in a final formal report of a field trip.

We find that younger, less mature writers do not demonstrate flexibility in adjusting their English when they begin to write in school. At first, we find most students record English that resembles their speech patterns. Later, they begin to explore more formal, textbook-like language. Eventually, they experiment with language to accomplish varying intents for differing audiences in several genres of discourse.

While younger, less mature writers seldom write purposefully in a nonschool, nonstandard dialect, many have learned to consider their English so inferior that they are reluctant to use it except with their most trusted friends. Teaching students to write with flexibility begins with teachers validating writers' attempts at communication by accepting whatever English writers are able to command and then requiring those students to begin to write for increasingly more distant audiences. The students use new and varied types of discourse, each with an expected intent, and write on progressively more sophisticated topics. In time the writers can be expected to develop the flexibility that is prized among the most mature and successful writers.

Skilled writers are those individuals who are capable of adjusting their English as needed to communicate successfully in different contexts. The goal in writing instruction should be to help student writers develop proficiency in selecting and writing English appropriate for communicating specific content and producing a desired effect on an identified audience.

Teachers can help students build confidence as writers by incorporating the following strategies:

1. Recognize that speakers and writers of all dialects communicate in a valid and acceptable language appropriate in some contexts on some topics when communicating to some audiences.
2. Avoid correction for standardization of English before discussing the essay in terms of intended audience, specificity of language to accomplish a specific purpose for the writing, and the possible need for language changes for more successful communication.
3. Ask students to identify the intended reader and ascertain whether the essay language used is appropriate for that audience. Students then could determine whether the language of the writing should be different and explore how it should be changed. Questions addressed could include:

   - What terminology should be substituted?
   - What grammar should be altered?
   - What phraseology should be clarified and how?
   - What figurative language and idiomatic expressions would not be understood and how could they be replaced with more communicative language?
   - What degree in specificity of content is warranted by the reader's knowledge of the topic or situation written about in the essay?
   - What level of formality is most appropriate for the identified audience?
   - What effects will the language choice have on the reader?

4. Help students determine the nature of other audiences for whom this writing would or would not be appropriate and why.
5. When possible have the intended reader receive, read, and provide feedback regarding the clarity and appropriateness of the language and its tone in the writing.
6. Have students rewrite their essay for a different audience. Prior to rewriting, students should explore how their essay should be different, discuss which terminology would need to be changed an why, determine how the grammar could be altered to produce varied understandings, and decide what other content alterations and additions would be necessary to communicate successfully to a new reader. After the rewriting activity, have the new audience (readers) read the modified essays and provide feedback to the authors about understandability, effectiveness, and suggestions for improvement.
7. Help students, when they are editing their writing, to clarify the intended meaning in their writing. Students can learn to avoid

verb tense confusion by ascertaining "when and how many did what." Teachers also need to help students explore misunderstandings that may result from distant and/or undeterminable pronoun referents.

9. Allow peer responses across dialects. This opportunity should be avoided only when having individuals from the same dialect group providing revision and editing feedback.
10. Read exemplary literature to students as models of the sound of written English they will be expected to produce.

Writing Prompt Format

The writing prompts used for the California writing assessment and included as examples in the writing guides are organized into two parts: the writing situation and directions for writing. The writing situation contains prewriting information and directives designed to motivate students' thinking about the assignment. In this part, students should be given background about the topic and encouraged to discover understandings and ideas about the situation. The intent of this section is to help prepare students for the specific assignment that follows in the directions for writing. In the directions for writing, students are given specific instructions regarding the assignment intent, topic, and (often) anticipated organization of content, a specification of audience, and other directions to keep in mind when they are responding to prompts.

Students often need assistance when reading the writing prompts. They need to practice strategies that are useful in understanding and interpreting writing assignments. It may be necessary to begin with teacher-directed lessons that incorporate the suggestions here. The purpose of such guidance would be that small groups of students eventually would be able to discuss a prompt and come to agreement about its expectations with less guidance from a teacher. The ultimate goal would be that each student could understand assigned writing tasks and be able to determine expectations without assistance. In the following example of a prompt, the writing situation and directions for writing are dissected to illustrate suggested strategies.

Preparing Your Cousin for School

Writing Situation: Your cousin is moving to your town. This cousin is your age and will attend your school. Your cousin's biggest concern is having to change schools.

Directions for Writing: Write your cousin a letter about your school. Tell about your school's strengths and weaknesses. Tell about things that are special in your school. You may want to offer some advice on how new students are treated. Be as honest and informative as possible. Help prepare your cousin for the change.

Questions students should consider when analyzing the writing situation could include:

- What is the situation? What is happening?
- What do I know about this situation?
- How would I have felt (or reacted) in the same situation? Or, what is my opinion?

Through review of these questions, the student writer's thinking is oriented to the situation that prompted the writing assignment. In this example the student's attention is focused on the cousin's pending move, and the student is guided through a consideration of the problems involved in changing schools. The student writer is asked to recall any personal prior experiences related to this situation. If there are none the student can be asked to conjecture what such an experience would be like. Finally, the student can be prompted to consider himself or herself in a similar situation, to imagine attitudes, circumstances, frame of mind, and so forth faced by the cousin. In this way the writer is taught to use the situation as a perspective for the writing task at hand.

Questions for analyzing the directions for writing could include:

- What is the topic? What am I expected to write about?
- Does the prompt suggest what I should include?
- For whom is it intended? What does the reader know? What does the reader need to know? What do I wish to tell the reader?
- What else should I keep in mind?
- What am I expected to do?

The focus provided by the previous questions helps guide the writer through the process of identifying the specific topic, intent, and audience

in the writing assignment. In the first question the student is required to determine the specific topic. Note that while the situation (a cousin's pending move) is related to the topic (description of your school), they are not the same. This difference could easily go unnoticed by less prepared or careless readers. As with many assignments, this prompt also requires the writer to consider several content points that include:

- Strengths and weaknesses of the school
- Things that are special in your school
- Advice on how new students are treated

A discussion of the identified content points can help the student to organize the content in his or her essay. Although teacher-directed at first, students should later be able to assume more responsibility for coming to agreement about what they are expected to do. The recipient of the letter is identified in the prompt as the cousin. Further, although not stated, it can be assumed that the cousin (potential reader) is not familiar with the writer's school. Otherwise, there would be no need for this letter. The writer needs to consider the reader's needs in making judgments about the type and quantity of information to be included in the letter. Additionally, the writer should consider what someone his or her age would like or need to know about a new school. In summarizing the writing task requirements, the student can demonstrate understanding of the prompt's expectations through a statement such as "I am to write a letter explaining to my cousin what to expect when he changes to my school."

Questions that facilitate students' understanding of the writing prompt can be posted in the classroom for handy reference. By using them with each new writing assignment, teachers can help student writers learn to employ these questioning strategies automatically and independently when reading writing assignments.

Vocabulary for Specific Types of Writing

Each kind of writing necessitates a specific type of thinking and composing that is prompted by the vocabulary selected for writing assignments. The following partial glossary may be helpful in understanding the specific type of composing experience prompted by the directions for a writing assignment. While words in the glossary are presented here out of context, they should not be taught in isolation. These terms are meaningful only when viewed within the context of a writing assignment as the student uses prior experience and current composing activities to give definition to these words. Many of the terms need to be discussed in reference to the literature or writing models used. For example, the comparison of autobiographical writing with biographical writing can best be understood when actual writings are examined to discover the perspective of the author in relation to the subject and experiences reported. This vocabulary list is not intended for drill and practice but rather for use within the process of daily writing activities.

Speculation About Causes and Effects

Cause: what makes something happen
Change: to make something different
Consequence: an effect or result
Convincing: believable
Effect: something brought about by some action or cause; result
Judgment: ability to decide wisely
Reasons: beliefs, motives, or causes for an action
Speculate: think, ponder, form theories

Reflective Essay

Cause: answers "Why?"
Concrete: an incident; a particular, observable event
Description: a word picture; specific, concrete details
Discovery: new understanding
Exploration: examination of alternatives and possibilities
Generalization: applying understanding of one situation to others
Narration: tells what happened
Personal experience: an event that happened to or was observed by the writer

Report of Information

Details: small pieces of information
Experience: knowledge or skill gained through direct activity or practice
Fact: something known with certainty
Generalization: something true in most but not in all cases; a general statement
Inform: to let know; to tell
Interpret: to explain or clarify meaning
Observation: what can be seen or noticed

Report: an organized telling of information
Summary: a short statement presenting the main points

Controversial Issue

Argument: reasons offered for or against an assertion
Assertion: an opinion, position, or conclusion
Commitment: taking a stand, applying values to the particular situation
Consequence: a result or effect
Convincing: reasonable, believable
Criteria: principles or values applicable to the issue
Evidence: argument or details that support an assertion
Inference: a conclusion based on logical argument
Problem: question that is difficult to resolve
Reasons: motives, causes, explanations

Autobiographical Incident

Autobiographical: writing by the person who saw or was involved in the incident
Describe: tell about
Feelings: attitudes, emotions
Incident: a single event occurring during a short period of time (a matter of minutes, an hour, or at longest a day)
Learning: how you changed in skill or knowledge
Memorable: worth remembering
Narrative action: events in a story
Personal experience: something that happened to you
Scene: where an event happened
Significance: importance

Interpretation

Background, context: knowledge necessary for understanding of the text, event, subject
Claim: assertion about the meaning of the text
Criteria: general principles or values that allow choice or judgment
Explanation: support of assertions by providing reasons or causes or through the analysis of details or evidence
Interpret: to clarify meaning and importance
Meaning: what is significant to say about a text, event, subject
Reflection: thoughtful exploration

Evaluation

Convince: to cause one to believe as you do
Criteria: standards or rules by which a judgment is made
Evaluate: to judge or find worth
Evidence: support for a judgment
Example: a sample often used as evidence of a judgment; moral or pattern
Favorite: best-liked
Judgment: one's opinion
Proof: showing that something is true or accurate by evidence
Reasons: explanations of beliefs or actions
Specifics: details
Support: to help prove the truth or correctness of a statement
Worth: value

Observational Writing

Describe: tell about, a verbal picture
Happened: took place, occurred
Involve: include as a part
Learning: knowledge gained; information acquired; one's education, knowledge, or skill
Observe: watch, notice, see
Reaction: response, an opposing action
Witnessed: saw, observed, had personal knowledge

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